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# OUT OF SOCIETY.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. PULLEYNE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:  
CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.  
1875.

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To  
HER HIGHNESS  
THE  
PRINCESS DE NAR-BEY,  
IN  
GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE  
OF  
MANY KINDNESSES.

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# OUT OF SOCIETY.

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## CHAPTER I.

“AND ALL WENT MERRY AS A MARRIAGE  
BELL.”

MOST novels end with a marriage.

Mine commences with one.

It is not the adventures of a love-sick maiden I am about to relate.

It is the story of a woman.

A woman whose life only began when the plain gold circlet was placed upon her finger, whose past had not been life at all, but a dreamy existence, a sweet summer idyl spent among the sunny lanes and pleasant places of her native land.

The music of wedding bells floats across me as I write—floats over moor and meadow, suburb and city, now soft and low, now indistinct, now clear, ringing out with quick defiant joyousness on the calm still air, dying in mournful cadences as the wind bears it away.

Life and death, sunshine and cloud, all the great mysteries of human existence, have an affinity with the bells; rich and poor, high and low, all have fellowship with the bells.

They herald the birth of the new-born heir.

They toll for his father's death.

A vein of sadness runs through their sweetest chimes, and the martial peæn that proclaims the conqueror's triumph is but the requiem of the slain !

To me the music of the bells is ever akin to sorrow.

I never hear them as I do now, ringing out on the clear cold air, without tears starting to my eyes; some secret chord,

some undefinable tone pervades their merriest peal, as the faint sweet notes of a favourite air steal through the bars of an opera, as the echoes of the bells steal through the life of the woman whose history I am about to relate.

They are ringing now loudly and joyously on Beatrice Hyde's wedding-day. The little church of St. Stephen's, the most fashionable church in the most fashionable London suburb, is crowded with a gay and aristocratic assemblage ; one more victim is being sacrificed on the altars of Vanity Fair—a young girl hitherto unnoticed by the *elite* of society is wedding the best *parti* of the season, Sir Reginald Slade.

Not that Beatrice Hyde was considered in the light of a victim either by herself or her friends.

Her male acquaintances declared her, and her female thought her, a “deuced lucky girl.”

Cautious old dowagers and match-making mothers stigmatised her amongst them-

selves as an artful designing young person, who had evidently taken poor Sir Reginald in.

They had fired off their daughters for several seasons at his head; they had angled and fished for the wealthy young baronet, without ever getting him on the hook; and when suddenly he announced his intention of marrying a pretty, but portionless girl, they vented their anger and disappointment in secret on the head of the innocent bride.

They came to her wedding nevertheless, and courted and congratulated her; their daughters declared her an accomplished coquette, despite her demure behaviour, but went into raptures about her rich trousseau and costly presents, having an eye (as all *well-bred girls should*) to the gay entertainments and fashionable receptions of the future Lady Slade.

Sir Reginald's friends held divers opinions on the matter.

Those whom he knew well thought *him* a fool.

Those who knew him well thought *her* a fool.

They were delighted, however, to come to the wedding, and drank the health of the bride and bridegroom with as much apparent cordiality as any one there.

As for Beatrice, she was proud and happy, and very grateful to Sir Reginald Slade for choosing her out of so many rich and beautiful girls. She had hitherto led such an isolated life that the world seemed turned suddenly into fairy land, and if she did not love Sir Reginald so much as she fancied in her girlish dreams she could love the man of her choice, well, she cared for no other man, and was determined to make him a good and devoted wife.

I want my readers to look at the bridal party as they stand round the altar rails.

I want my readers to photograph them on their memory, for we shall meet them often in the pages of this history !

*Place aux dames, Messieurs.*

A tall slight figure, a pure pale face, soft dark eyes, and waves of chestnut hair, a

vision of white shimmering silk and rich creamy lace, such is Beatrice, the orphan daughter of Colonel Hyde, and granddaughter of the Earl of Clanricarde. Left without father or mother at an early age, Beatrice and her sister Catherine have been brought up under the care of a maiden aunt, whose principal amusement was to pet and spoil her two nieces to her heart's content, and to instil into their youthful minds the former grandeur of their departed race, and the value of good birth over every other consideration. Poor they were but proud—sometimes the necessity of the sisters having to earn their bread as governesses was hinted at, but their fond old aunt would not hear of it, poverty was no disgrace, but teaching was, in the nineteenth century! So they passed their girlhood midst the wild thyme-scented slopes and sunny lanes of Moorshire, having few companions and fewer friends; seeing nothing of society except what an occasional county ball or croquet-party might give them, and knowing no more of



the world than was contained in the last new novel from Mudie's.

Was it a wonder then, when Sir Reginald Slade, down for the hunting season, fell in love with the gentle beauty and unassuming manners of Beatrice Hyde, he was accepted with delight, not only as an eligible suitor, but as a means of placing the two girls in that society which was their right and from which poverty alone withheld them?

Close behind Beatrice, as chief bridesmaid, stands her sister Catherine Hyde; her loveliness is of a far different type—masses of golden hair crown the aristocratic little head, her eyes are blue and large, shaded with long dark lashes, her nose Roman, her forehead high—a half scornful, half triumphant smile curls round the corners of her mouth, her white teeth firm and regular beam like pearls between her parted lips; she holds her head erect, gazing more at the stained glass window above the altar, than at the altar itself; her body is well poised, and there is an air

of determination in the very clasp of her small and delicate hands that speaks more than words can express. She would do for a picture of Marie Antoinette, but it would be Marie Antoinette in the plenitude of her greatness, not the pale mourner of the Temple.

Slightly to the left of the bride, past the bevy of smiling bridesmaids, whose blue and white dresses set off the fairness of their complexions, stands Mrs. Stanley Harrington, wife of the Member for Moorshire, whose estate joins that of Sir Reginald Slade. Mrs. Harrington is a slight petite brunette, a first glance at her face gives you the impression of positive plainness, a second, and you would be struck with the varied expressions that flit over her features, the lights and shadows that come and go in the flashes of those dark passionate eyes.

She is not more than five-and-twenty, and report says when Isabel Beaufort was single, she was madly in love with Sir Reginald Slade, and only accepted Mr. Stanley

Harrington in a fit of jealous rage. Be that as it may she has come to see Sir Reginald married now, and stands behind his bride, with an air of well-bred indifference on her dark smiling face. She is attired in the height of fashion, every movement one of studied elegance, the heavy folds of her green velvet dress, bordered with silver fox, fall around her lithe and graceful figure; round her throat is clasped a necklace of opals set in the form of a serpent, whose ruby eyes gleam and glitter with every turn of her lissom form. By the side of his wife is Stanley Harrington, M.P. for Moorshire (conservative of course), a tall lanky fair haired swell, whose titled connexions have got him into the House, in which he only makes himself conspicuous by his absence. He looks awfully bored and languid now, as he studies with his eye-glass the various inscriptions round the chancel. Looking awfully bored and languid is his *rôle*, he is never himself in any other character.

"Weddings are demm'd nuisances," he

remarks, sotto voce, to the next man to him. "Why should a fellow have to dress up like a jack-pudding when he ought to be in bed? Why should he be forced to eat a dinner they call breakfast at that ungodly hour? It's so deuced flat too, one cannot for decency's sake get screwed at that time of the day; give him a good solid funeral, there was a chance of coming in for something there, besides assisting at a jolly row between the disappointed relatives. He wouldn't have been in the church to-day, but his wife—ah, well, his wife!"

Sir Reginald Slade is apparently a man about thirty years of age, of middle stature, light hair, eyes of cold steely blue; his mouth though partially hidden behind a soft silky moustache compressed and cruel. Even now when the consummation of his wishes is at hand, there is a hard stony expression on his otherwise agreeable face, and the smile that illumines it as he gazes on his bride is as sunlight on marble, lighting it up, but never warming—there is an air of restlessness about him which is

self-evident to those near the altar rails, but which at a distance is taken for becoming nervousness—his eyes flash quick impatient glances on the officiating minister ; like his friend Stanley Harrington, he is evidently bored to death by the whole proceeding—a registrar's office and one or two witnesses would have done the business quite as well, "Why women should be so confoundedly prejudiced and want all this bother about nothing, he cannot conceive."

By his side, in the character of best man, stands Lord Arthur Trelawney, Sir Reginald's boon companion and chosen friend, a polished, accomplished man of the world ; men call him a roué and a scamp, women a darling and a naughty boy ! Both are right ; women certainly have the advantage as they possess more opportunities of judging. He is handsome and dark with the *beauté de diable* ; his voice is low and trainante, his figure manly and imposing, he has a way with him no woman can resist, and no man has ever insulted him

twice. As he stands now, his arms folded across his chest, he resembles the statue of a young Hercules, but there is a cynical smile round his finely chiselled lips that spoils the otherwise perfect beauty of his face.

Beside him is a very different personage, Mr. Plantagenet Jones, the opulent banker, and justice of peace for Moorshire, a stout, red-faced fussy little man, with a bald head and iron-grey hair, and a shiny round face radiant with smiles.

Although a widower with two grown-up daughters amongst the bridesmaids, Mr. Plantagenet Jones affects juvenility, shaves off his whiskers and his beard, dresses in a style suitable to three-and-twenty; wears diamond studs and diamond rings in the morning, and smirks at the girls like a young buck of the reign of George the Fourth.

Who Mr. Plantagenet was, nobody knows, and nobody cares; men like Stanley Harrington, with little money and less brains, call him "that cad Jones," but they are nevertheless ready enough to eat

his dinners, and drink his wines, and vote him a jolly good fellow over the suppers for which he pays.

Plantagenet Jones is a millionaire; the probability is he could buy and sell a dozen times over any one in the church at the present moment; and, as some one has wisely observed, that "the only distinction now-a-days is money," Plantagenet Jones comes in for a very large share of it.

All that is known of his antecedents is his having entered as a clerk early in life, into the firm of Bullion & Co., Bankers, of Rubestown in Moorshire, where his pluck and perseverance, together with a little natural audacity, carried him on until he married his master's daughter, and became junior partner in the firm. His wife was a vain intriguing woman—his talent and her unscrupulous energy swept all before them, till one morning he found himself by old Bullion's death at the top of the tree, and worth nearly a million-and-a-half of money. Some stories got afloat, God only knows how such stories do get afloat, of a poor old

father dying in a workhouse in Wales, but—bosh, that was public calumny. Mr. Plantagenet Jones was the very essence of generosity,—subscribed largely to public institutions, gave the largest dinners and best fêtes in Moorshire, had all the aristocracy of the county, at times, at his house; nay, even royalty had condescended to lean on his arm when he organized a charitable bazaar, for the benefit of the county hospital; and it was even reported that Her Gracious Majesty intended to confer on him a baronetcy, for his speech at a public dinner, in praise of model lodging-houses.

He had long been a widower, but did not seem anxious to enter again the bonds of Hymen. I fancy he rather enjoyed emancipation from the iron rule of the late Mrs. Jones, who was both a tartar and a vixen,—at all events, Plantagenet, though a shocking flirt, never attempted to give her a successor; but lorded it about London, and in the clubs, to the infinite disgust of men who could date some eight centuries



back, but whom his money threw completely into the shade.

Plantagenet Jones possessed one remarkably good quality,—he was never known to be out of temper ; he swallowed chaff as easily as he did green peas, and was never more at home than in the midst of some festive gathering, or as when, on this occasion, he was acting as father to the young girl who was his daughter's favourite companion, and who, as the monarch of Moorshire, he felt it his duty to patronize and befriend.

One more picture, and I have done.

It is that of the young officiating priest !

St. Stephen's is a highly ritualistic church, and her ministers, both Rector and Curate, strongly imbued with the like principles. The Rector (the Honourable Hugh de Grey) having been seized with a sudden attack of illness on the morning of the marriage, that important duty has been left, perforce, to his Curate, the Rev. Adrian Hope.

The pretty little church, quite Gothic in

its style of architecture, is decked with evergreens and holly, for the season of Christmas is not yet passed.

On the altar stands the crucifix, the blessed symbol of man's redemption, surrounded by lights and flowers. Some parts of the church are shrouded in gloom, but the cold wintry sun streams in through the painted windows, and falls on the drooping figure of the bride, the fair patrician beauty of Catherine Hyde, the pale ascetic countenance of Adrian Hope.

His large dark eyes, burning with inward fire, are sunk deeply beneath his heavy brows, his cheeks are slightly hollow, his figure spare, his hands small and delicate as a woman's, attenuated even to painfulness ; yet there is a nameless grace about him, an almost divine beauty in his face which makes the observer feel he is no ordinary man ; his white robes throw out the paleness of his features. He looks like an ascetic monk stepped out of some mediæval picture, or one of those ardent

spirits out of which the Church of Rome has ever formed her saints.

Something in the slow impressive manner in which he reads the service, something in the deep sonorous tones of his voice, or, perhaps, the painful glare of the sunlight through the painted windows, causes Catherine Hyde to lower her gaze, which has hitherto been concentrated on the stained glass representation of the martyrdom of St. Stephen.

As her eyes fall on the young priest, apparently for the first time, a flush of crimson suffuses her cheeks, and she almost starts at his strange resemblance to the pictured martyr above.

All the pride, all the scorn vanishes out of her face; an expression of matchless tenderness and beauty lights up her features, softening the hardness of her Roman profile. She listens attentively to the holy mysterious marriage service—that symbol of the union of Christ with His Church—and then, when the last words

are uttered, the last blessing given, she follows the bridal party into the vestry, walking as though she were walking in a dream.

## CHAPTER II.

### MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

"I HEAR they are coming home at once."

"Who, mamma?"

"Why, Sir Reginald and Lady Slade. Dear me, Rosamond, how stupid you are! I do wish you would put that book down, and pay attention to what I am saying. I have told you twice Sir Reginald and Lady Slade are coming home directly."

"Well, I'm sure I don't care if they are," replied the girl her mother addressed as Rosamond, as, lolling back in a chair before the fire, her feet upon the fender, she continued the perusal of the obnoxious volume.

"'You don't care;' that is a very rude

remark to make, Rosamond, when you know how anxious I am about it, and how so much depends upon it; but it's just like you. Never mother was so disappointed and thwarted in a child as I am in you. I wish that trash was behind the fire, I do."

"Really, mamma, I cannot for the life of me see what Lady Slade's coming home has to do with us," answered Rosamond, laying down her book and shrugging her shoulders, "or why you should be so anxious about it."

"You never see anything," replied her mother, angrily; "you are so wrapped up in those rubbishy novels, you can never attend to matters of real life. How are you ever to get into society if I don't make an effort?"

The girl—she was little more than sixteen—shook back a mass of tawny hair from her low square forehead as she laughed scornfully,—

"Into society? Poor dear mamma, you have been trying that little amusement ever

since I can remember. I don't think Lady Slade will help much to that end."

"You know nothing about it, Rosamond," replied her mother, whose eyes were full of tears. "Pray, why should we not be in society as well as any one else? Your dear father is an officer, and I was a colonel's daughter, and my mother was a lady."

"Well, mamma?"

"Well, Rosamond, does not that prove to you we are quite as good as our neighbours, and have quite as much right to high society as they have?"

"We may have the right, but I don't see the means. What is the use of being ladies if we cannot keep up the position? It's no use talking, mamma, we have no money and no clothes: you cannot get on without both in these days."

"You speak painful truths, my dear," fretfully replied pale delicate little Mrs. Etheridge, "but in my day it was no matter about money or clothes, so long as people behaved themselves, and were of good family."

"Your 'day!'" retorted her daughter, scornfully tossing her head. "What can be the use of talking of the past? My day is coming now, and a black one it's likely to prove, for all that I can see in the future!" and the girl flung herself back in the arm-chair, and relapsed into the perusal of her novel.

"Rosamond, Rosamond," cried her mother, "how can you be so perverse? Am I not doing all I can for you? if you will only be guided by me now that these people are coming home. You are very ungrateful;" and the poor woman fairly burst into tears.

"No, indeed, I'm not," replied Rosamond, letting her book fall off her lap as she jumped up impetuously and kissed her mother. "I am very grateful to you, indeed, I am; but, oh! mamma, I'm so sick of all these shams. Why cannot we be contented to remain as we are, and acknowledge our poverty? Why must we be for ever pretending to be well off, when you know the misery it causes afterwards? I am sick of



seeing you continually put to such straits to keep up appearances," she added, with a gesture of impatience. "I wish I were a boy, and could get away and earn my own living.

"That is nonsense, my dear," said Mrs. Etheridge, drying her eyes; "you know all my exertions are for you and your brother Jack, and it pains me so dreadfully when I fancy you are ungrateful, or—"

"Silly mamma!" cried Rosamond, carressingly stroking her mother's face; "you know how dearly I love you; I don't wish you to put yourself to all these annoyances for me; why, I am only sixteen," she added, laughing; "thousands of things may happen before the year is out; papa may get his promotion, and then—"

"Ah! I wish your dear father was at home now," sighed Mrs. Etheridge.

"I don't," replied his daughter, doggedly. "I don't think he would find things very comfortable here."

"At all events we should have him to advise and console us," returned her mother.

“ Ah ! my dear, I was never so happy as when I was in barracks with your dear papa—that was life if you like ;” and the poor, weak-minded woman sighed again as she thought of the questionable pleasure of a barrack life with a poor lieutenant.

Rosamond had heard so much of this enviable existence, that, not knowing any better, she took for granted her mother's statement of the affair, and wished, if it would please Mrs. Etheridge, they could return to the life she only recollected as a little child. She had reminiscences of a good deal of grandeur and military glory, of drums beating and colours flying, and of being petted and spoiled by a number of handsome men and gaily-dressed ladies. She had recollections of large numbers of people gathering out to see them wherever they went, and much shouting and laughter, but that was all. Rosamond's experiences of a military life were confined to her childhood, and her mother's morbid and exaggerated regrets.

Oswald Etheridge was the senior captain

in a marching regiment, which had been for the last ten years in India, whither Mrs. Etheridge's delicate health, and the care of her children, would not permit her to follow him.

The poor woman had been leading a life of continual struggle at home, striving to give her children the best education in her power, and to keep up the appearances of the glittering show she so much regretted, on means wholly inadequate to the attempt ; the consequences were debt, difficulty, and a continued fretfulness on the part of Mrs. Etheridge, which all the buoyant spirits of her children could never utterly repress.

Jack and Rosamond had received a tolerably good education, and, in fact, a far better one than their mother's means could afford ; she spent the whole of the poor captain's allowance on the two children, living herself on a small annuity of her own, eked out by occasional help from friends.

Jack and Rosamond were more or less spoiled. Jack had just entered himself as a midshipman, having preferred a seafaring

life to any other mode of existence ; and Rosamond had just returned from boarding-school to Fern Cottage, where she augured well to become both her mother's torment and delight.

Mrs. Etheridge had been married when quite a girl herself, in fact, not seventeen ; the consequence was that both her grown-up son and daughter treated their weak-minded mother as they would an elder sister—with slight deference and more familiarity, and a great deal of petting and fondling whenever they wanted to get anything out of her. Not that they were not fond of her in their way ; they would have done anything to have made her happy, and to see her smile, but they were self-willed, refractory, disobedient children ; Rosamond by her superior intellect, and Jack by his mother's foolish fondness, ruling the nervous timid woman to their heart's content.

Jack had declared his intention of going to sea, and to sea he went, despite his mother's tears and prayers. Rosamond

steadily refused to return to boarding-school, and at home she stayed, dividing her time between roaming in the fields and reading novels, heedless of Mrs. Etheridge's well meant remonstrances. Rosamond listened to all her mother had to say, shrugged her shoulders, and stopped from school ; Jack kissed his mother, expatiated on the advantages of the naval over the military service, looked handsome, and went to sea.

Mrs. Etheridge had come into Moorshire when her husband sailed for India, having some relatives in Rubestown, and had taken the little dwelling dignified by the name of Fern Cottage, which was situated on the outskirts of the town—a sort of half-way house between the county people and the bourgeois. Here she contrived to live as she called it “like a lady,” and kept up a sort of bowing acquaintance with the gentry in Rubestown, and the wealthy families who had their seats in the neighbourhood. She managed to meet them at balls, concerts, charitable bazaars, and other occasional

festivities that enlivened the monotony of Rubestown.

Some who knew her in other days would stop their carriage at the little cottage in the valley to enquire after the health and welfare of one who, however foolish she had been in her marriage, was yet of their order. Some few would ask her on rare occasions to their houses, and Mrs. Etheridge lost no opportunity of improving any chance acquaintance that might come in her way.

"It is all for my poor girl's sake," she would say to her intimates, "for myself I have given up all pleasure long ago, but I owe it to my child to go as much as I can into society; it will be of such benefit to her hereafter."

Rosamond, however, was not as grateful for her mother's exertions, as she should have been, she was a self-willed, self-opinionated girl, whose mind had been more or less perverted by a series of light objectionable reading; but who, nevertheless, had common sense enough to see the hollowness of

the life her mother presented for her imitation. She was blunt and straight-forward, disliking everything in the shape of shams or falsehoods, and preferring a wild country existence, to the trammels of that society of which she had seen so little, but heard so much.

At the period of which I am writing, Rosamond Etheridge was by no means a nice girl to know ; she was in the habit of speaking her mind a little too freely, and giving her opinion unasked in a way that caused her delicate sensitive mother to blush with pain ; no one fell more severely under the lash of her criticisms, than that fond and foolish woman herself. Yet Rosamond dearly loved her mother, she would willingly have made any sacrifice for her had it been in her power ; what she hated was, to see her mother so much the slave of her own weak mind and exaggerated ideas on the subject of society.

Jack Etheridge was a good natured gentlemanly youth, a year older than his sister, full of fun and frolic as all boys should be,

and the secret idol of his mother's heart. She had shed many bitter tears when the year before he first announced his intention of going to sea, and positively refused her consent ; but when Jack threatened to run away from school, she relented, and when after his first voyage he returned safe and sound, looking handsomer than ever, Mrs. Etheridge calmed her agonies, and was rather proud than otherwise of the gallant young middy whom everybody liked, and who had a good word for everybody.

Rosamond adored her brother, she could get on so much better with him, than with her mother, the frank fearless nature of the boy agreed with her own straightforward character, there was no specious glossing over, no halfways, or petty disguises, with the bold young midshipman. Rosamond wished with all her heart she had been a boy, and could have followed her brother to sea or have entered the army, like her father. It was this feeling, always uppermost in her mind, that made her say so



bitterly and earnestly on this particular occasion, that she wished she could "go away and earn her own living."

"It is no use talking like that, Rosamond," repeated her mother, "there is only one way a lady can work, and that is by being a governess ; but in the first place you are too young, in the next you would lose caste altogether. What would your father say," added Mrs. Etheridge with a glance of indignant reproach at her refractory child, "if I allowed you to go out as a governess ?"

"He would say you did perfectly right," replied positive Rosamond, "if you cannot afford to keep me at home ; but, as you say, mamma, it's no use talking about an impossibility, no one would have a girl like me, even if I knew enough, which I very much doubt," and Rosamond laughed saucily as she rocked herself to and fro in her chair.

"There is no knowing what there may be in the future," said her mother. "Why this very Lady Slade was no one in par-

ticular, and they say she hadn't a penny in the world when Sir Reginald proposed for her."

"I don't suppose there is another Sir Reginald waiting for me," remarked Rosamond, turning over the pages of her book. "She's very pretty, isn't she, mamma?"

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Etheridge; "her sister Miss Catherine Hyde is, but the one Sir Reginald has married is not fit to hold a candle to her, a pale face, brown hair; rather elegant-looking certainly, but when you have said that, you have said all."

"Why did he marry her?" asked Rosamond simply.

"Well, I suppose he was in love with her, my dear; men generally are, or fancy themselves to be, when they marry a woman. Perhaps her aunt, Miss Betty Hyde, made up the match; she looks like one of that sort."

"Where did you first meet them, mamma?"

"I met them at the horticultural show

last summer, and afterwards at the Hunt Ball in the autumn, I could not comprehend for the life of me what Sir Reginald found to fancy in that pale, insipid-looking creature ; her sister really *is* a beauty."

"What is Miss Hyde like?" questioned Rosamond, interested as all women are in the charms of their sex.

"Oh, fair as a flower, with the loveliest golden hair and blue eyes in the world ; in fact, my dear, she puts me in mind of what your poor dear grandmamma must have been when a girl. There was a picture of her at home after the style of Sir Joshua Reynolds, such a pretty little pet she must have been. I took after my father," added Mrs. Etheridge, quite an unnecessary reminder to Rosamond, for her mother, though still pretty, was a perfect brunette ; "I cannot imagine whatever made Sir Reginald fancy Lady Beatrice, when her sister was by her side."

"Perhaps the sister wouldn't have him," laughed Rosamond. "I would not marry a man just because he was rich," said the

girl with the thoughtless decision of youth. —“Lady Beatrice, it is a very pretty name, much prettier than Catherine, perhaps he imagined Lady Beatrice would sound better than Lady Catherine.”

“Don’t talk such nonsense, Rosamond !” cried her mother, “she is Lady Slade, not Lady Beatrice, she is not a lady in her own right. I hope she will give nice parties,” added the officer’s wife meditatively.

“Why? do you think we shall be invited, mamma?”

“Of course we shall; I must call and leave cards on the poor young thing; she does not look as if she were capable of much, but she must ask us to her receptions if she returns the visit.”

“Which she will be *sure* to do,” commented the provoking Rosamond with a satirical smile.

“I don’t see the *sure*, you disagreeable girl,” retorted her mother snappishly. “For what reason, pray?”

But Rosamond, who saw she had again “put her foot into it,” as her brother ex-

pressed it, did not feel inclined to continue the discussion, so ignored the question by asking, "If we go, whatever are we to wear? We haven't a dress fit to be seen in."

"Oh, leave that to me," replied Mrs. Etheridge, "all I ask of you is to be civil, and not to spoil all my exertions by your rude remarks. If Lady Slade has felt the want of money, as people say she has, she will know how to make excuses for others."

"Now it's just those kind of people who never do; they look down upon any one who is poor when they become rich themselves, at least so books say," added Rosamond, seeing the look of annoyance depicted on her mother's face. "Never mind, mamma, I will go where you go, and promise not to be rude, but I am certain I shall hate them for all that."

"There seems to be no one you do like," observed Mrs. Etheridge plaintively. "I never saw such a girl in my life."

Rosamond planted her feet on the fender, threw her arms over her head, and stared meditatively at the ceiling for some

seconds. "Very few, I'll allow; I certainly shall not like Lady Slade if she is at all like Mrs. Stanley Harrington, but I really don't see, mamma, what it matters in the least; perhaps they won't like me."

This possible contingency had evidently not suggested itself to Mrs. Etheridge, for she stared at Rosamond for a moment in silence, and then answered sharply, "You are talking foolishly. They are sure to like you if you behave properly, and don't call people by vulgar names. Where you learnt such behaviour I don't know."

"I don't know myself," said the girl, laughing, "unless from Jack; but there, mamma dear, I am quite tired of discussing these Slades. It might be the Princess of Wales coming into Moorshire, instead of a paltry Baronet's wife! Now may I read my book?"

"Certainly, Rosamond. You see, my child, one has very little to interest one in Rubestown. It is such a dead and alive place, and this young bride will be quite an addition to our little circle."

"That depends upon circumstances," said positive Rosamond; "she may be nice, or she may not."

"Well, the Joneses think her nice?"

"The Joneses are fools," promptly returned Rosamond.

Mrs. Etheridge raised her hands.

"Rosamond! your great friends!"

"Fools for all that, mamma. They are for ever taking up and patronizing some people or other in whom they see imaginary virtues. I like the Jones girls well enough, and they don't patronize *me*"—with a meaning glance at her mother—"but that's no reason why I should swallow all their acquaintances."

"Well, Lady Slade was stopping with them last summer."

"When I was racking my brains to death at that horrid old school!"

"Exactly, my dear; but your brains (or rather the want of them) have not suffered much by the exertion!" replied her mother, quickly.

"I never intended they should," laughed

Rosamond ; "but now, mamma dear, let me finish my book. It's so much more interesting than Lady Slade, who will, no doubt, be far too grand even to notice us."

"It's getting dark ; let us have tea first," replied Mrs. Etheridge, ignoring her daughter's last remark.

"As you please, mamma," replied the girl carelessly, rising from her seat, and laying the book down.

"And, my dear, if it's the last novel that came in the box from Mudie's, you might read a little of it aloud to me. I have got as far as the second volume."

"Exactly where I am myself. What page did you leave off at, mamma?"

"Oh, where the Earl, seeking for his lost bride, comes upon the bandit's cave in the forest. I rather like the style," said poor weak little Mrs. Etheridge.

"Thrilling, deliciously thrilling, isn't it !" exclaimed Rosamond, excitedly ; "we will have tea at once, mamma. I am dying to finish it, it is so much nicer than those stupid novels of Sir Walter Scott's."



"Why, my dear, they are standard literature," cried her astonished mother, looking with dismay at her daughter.

"Standard fiddlesticks! Awful old proser. I like something sensational, in the Braddon style; something that makes your flesh creep when you go to bed at night."

"Oh, you dreadful girl!" said her mother, smiling admiration at her, nevertheless; "you put me in mind of my young days, when Mrs. Ratcliffe's romances were all the rage. I believe it was those books that first put it into my head to run away with your poor dear papa. He was so like Vivaldi in the 'Italian.'"

"Well, I don't think any book would induce me to follow your example," said Rosamond; "I have never yet seen a man I could like, much less run away with. I don't know what I might do if I were tempted," added the girl, meditatively.

"Oh, dear me, Rosamond! don't frighten me!" cried the mother in alarm, stopping in the midst of her operations of clearing the table to gaze at her

thoughtless daughter. "Don't you go and follow your brother's example."

"Oh, you silly old mother; how can you be so foolish. I shall be an old maid, and live with you always. Let me get your tea, now, darling, and then for the 'Lost Bride of Eversleigh.'"

## CHAPTER III.

### RUBESTOWN.

RUBESTOWN, as Mrs. Etheridge had justly remarked, was in want of some exciting element in its fashionable circle. It was, like all provincial towns, very dull, very flat, and very stupid. It had a Market, a Town Hall, and Assembly Rooms. The Market was used once a week, the Town Hall every day, and the Assembly Rooms on grand occasions. It had one long narrow street, dignified by the name of High Street; it had various byeways and turnings—it had a river, a bridge, and the Parish Church; in fact, for so small a place it had a great number of churches, and a greater number of public houses, and its

inhabitants were consequently very religious and very dissipated.

There were Meeting Houses and Chapels of every denomination—Baptists, Methodists, Roman Catholics, and Quakers.

One would have thought, looking at the designations of the different sects inscribed in the guide book, it was the most tolerant town in all England, whereas, in reality, it was quite the reverse, and its various congregations hated and reviled each other as only Christian congregations can.

It had its Botanical Gardens also, where the Annual Flower Shows were held, and its Races, when the refuse of all the adjoining villages and towns poured into the quiet little city; and on such occasions the public houses had the better of their rivals the churches, drawing by far the larger audiences.

For four months of the year it was intensely dull; the remaining eight were not quite so bad, for then most of the county families were at their seats, and there was seldom a day without a drag or barouche

putting up at the "Black Eagle," the chief hotel in Rubestown.

Its staple trade being agricultural, there were no smoking manufactories to blacken the air or disturb the calm of the inhabitants, and the railroad was at present too far away to spoil the serenity of the quiet little streets by the weekly cargo of trippers.

In short, Rubestown—given, a nice house, agreeable society, and a capacity for enjoying life—was not by any means a bad spot to spend a few months in the year.

The shooting and fishing were both excellent; the hunting the best in the kingdom. It was within reasonable reach of some of the larger provincial cities, and the society around consisted of the noblest and wealthiest families in the county.

There was a good library, capital club, and excellent swimming baths. There was the bank, of which Mr. Plantagenet Jones was the head, and over whose counter poor little Mrs. Etheridge had her quarterly re-

mittances shovelled by a dapper little clerk, whose sole idea of human bliss was, to be able to shovel gold about as if it were so much dirt, and to bang down a pair of scales, with the startling consciousness of having achieved something great.

There was the post-office—a real post-office, not a counter in a grocer's shop, where you had to wait for a letter while he weighed out two ounces of tea, but a building of its own, with a staff of clerks and letter carriers attached, and telegraph office at the side.

Rubestown possessed, also, a guildhall and corporation, and boasted somewhat of its various benevolent societies, as tending greatly to the well-doing of the town and its inhabitants.

Progress had not made rapid strides in Rubestown; the place had remained stationary for the last twenty years, and seemed likely to do so for twenty more. Now and then some enterprising builder startled the inhabitants by erecting a stately mansion on the outskirts of the town, or

ran up a new street of pretty cottages, where dirty hovels had formerly reigned, but these innovations were regarded as innovations by the good folks of Rubestown, who turned out *en masse* to see them, and gave it as their opinion "it wouldn't pay."

An atmosphere of stagnation seemed to pervade the place ; everything went on in the same dull routine as it had done for years. The races, the flower-shows, the hunt and county balls were held at their appointed times ; but the only new element in Rubestown was the decided Ritualistic tendencies of some of the last-appointed curates, and the consequent faction fights between the churchwardens and their ministers and the fair members of the low and Anglican congregations.

The "views" held by such and such a parson, the disputes between some hot-headed rector and his bishop, the falling-off in attendance of parishioners of the established principles,—these formed a constant subject of conversation, not only in the houses of the faithful, but also in the

various benevolent and Dorcas societies of which, as I said before, Rubestown boasted, and which were extensively patronised by the county ladies, who took up the quarrels of their favourite preachers with the zeal and animosity such important disputes invariably engendered.

Chesham Court, the residence of Sir Reginald Slade, was situated just on the outskirts of Rubestown, and Harrington, or, as the country people called it, "the Hall," adjoined it on the other side.

Over the river, at the opposite end of the town, on a rising slope, in the midst of a lordly park, was "Bingley Towers," the palatial residence of Mr. Plantagenet Jones, which, like everything belonging to Mr. Jones, was large, magnificent, and gorgeous.

It was something between an old baronial castle and an Italian villa; for Mr. Jones, with a sovereign contempt for all the laws of architecture, had his house built according to his own ideas; and whenever he saw anything particularly striking in



his neighbour's territory, had it immediately adapted to his own.

His rooms were filled with some of the most beautiful paintings and exquisite statuary in the world; every *chef d'œuvre* of art that he fancied, he bought; there were galleries and galleries of pictures, crowded together without the slightest regard to order or time,—a Murillo and a Paul Veronese hanging side by side with the works of Frith or Faed. There were statues from Greece and marbles from Rome, mingling with nineteenth century bronzes and vases of terra cotta. Some rare specimens of Dresden or Sévres would ornament a table filled with a modern service of silver plate: and costly tapestry curtains, or antique lace, decorate a boudoir fitted up in the last gimcrack style of bastard French upholstery.

One would almost have thought, at a first glance at these rooms, one had suddenly dropped in the storehouse of some gigantic curiosity dealer, or into a vast museum that was waiting classification and arrange-

ment, the confusion was so great and the mass so heterogeneous.

Mr. Plantagenet Jones led his guests with conscious pride through the halls and galleries of his princely home, expatiating on the merits of this, the demerits of that; taking care to inform every one of the exact cost of such and such a picture, such and such a mosaic; the actual value, in his eyes, being the actual price he had paid for them.

Plantagenet Jones was wise in his generation. He observed that a certain respect was paid to the possessors of articles of *vertu* that was not accorded to other men, however wealthy they might be. He felt it was the thing to have such articles about him; and, picking up a smattering of knowledge from the various dealers he purchased them from, together with the information he gained in foreign travel, he was enabled to converse on the subject in a manner that completely deceived the casual observer.

It was only men who possessed real in-

formation on the subject who saw how shallow and superficial his knowledge really was, and who were disgusted with the coarseness of the mind that valued a picture for the money it had cost, quite overlooking the genius that wrought it.

Plantagenet Jones had two daughters—Maria and Jane—jolly buxom girls, full of good nature and high spirits ; short and stout, like their father, with round smiling faces, and coils of red hair.

They were liked by every one, for their kindness of heart and invariable good humour ; nothing ever seemed to come amiss or become a trouble to them. They were the best horsewomen in the county, generally following the hounds with their father. They could row, skate, and shoot as well as any man within ten miles of their estate, and, at the same time, they were indefatigable in attending their schools and Dorcas societies, and getting up bazaars and fancy fairs for the poor of Rubestown ; in fact, there was very little that the Jones girls could not, or did not do ; though some con-

ceited young fools spoke of them as "awful good fun."

Maria and Jane visited in, and were visited by, the very best society. Nobody had an ill word for them. They were thought rather fast, and a wee bit vulgar, as, like their father, they affected a loud style of dress and wore an abundance of jewellery; but their merry ways and unaffected sincerity won every one who knew them.

They were perfectly aware their father was the richest man in the county, and honestly believed (not without reason) their wealth gave them an equal standing with the oldest family there, but they nevertheless had none of the *parvenu's* contempt for poverty. The poorest family, so long as it was family at all, had a place at their table, an invitation to their balls.

It was owing to them, "so they said," that Sir Reginald Slade first made the acquaintance of Beatrice Hyde, as the Hydies, aunt and nieces, were staying at Bingley Towers, when Sir Reginald came down to his seat to shoot. Be that as it may, the two good-

natured girls certainly gave the young orphan every chance of winning her titled husband, and were as delighted to be her bridesmaids as they would have been to be his bride.

A distant cousin of her mother's, a Miss Sarah Archer, lived with them in the capacity of *chaperone* and lady housekeeper. She was a person of uncertain age, whose temper having been slightly soured in early life by the failure of a love affair, visited the consequences on her young relatives whenever she had the chance.

Maria and Jane cared very little for Miss Sarah's tantrums, they invariably left her to herself whenever she had an especial fit of the blues ; and, as she was extremely useful in other ways, relieving them from all the arduous duties of housekeeping and entertaining, interfered very little with her arrangements.

Miss Archer went in strongly for religion. She, like her young charges, frequented All Saints', the principal Ritualistic church of Rubestown ; "it was so much

more genteel to be high church," said Maria Jones, in answer to a friend's enquiry concerning her religious "views." "No one but a set of old fogies patronised the Evangelicals."

The Rector of All Saints' was a good-tempered old clergyman, who left the management of his choir and services principally to his parishioners. He cared very little with how many lights and flowers his altar was decorated, so that he was not worried, and allowed the young Anglicans and their cousin, the demure and proper Miss Sarah Archer, to superintend both church and schools, on the consideration that the whole affair was mainly supported by old Jones's money.

It was not very clerical, and it was not very dignified, but the golden key can unlock a church as well as any other door, and the she curates did an immensity of good in their way, distributing no end of coals and blankets in the winter, besides giving away soup and bread to all who chose to come for them.

“They are really very good girls, and it is an amusement for them,” said the Rector, when some zealous brother minister remonstrated with him on the subject. “It would be well if all our young ladies followed the example of the Joneses, instead of thinking of nothing but dress and sweethearts.” So he smiled at their religious fervour, ate their father’s dinners, and intoned as many services as they pleased.

The Rector was failing in health himself, and did not care to be bothered with unnecessary church work; Maria and Jane attended to the sanctuary, filled the vases with flowers, scraped the candles for the candlesticks, decorated the pillars and aisles with holly and paper roses at Christmas, and spent their leisure hours in embroidering altar cloths and banners for processions.

Miss Sarah Archer also devoted herself mainly to this kind of work—it was her hobby. She seldom, or never, accompanied her young cousins to London during the season, preferring, like Cæsar, to be mon-

arch over a small village, rather than be second in Rome.

All Saints' and the district appertaining thereto was a region over which, on the strength of her connection with Mr. Plantagenet Jones, she held unlimited sway ; her word was law in either church or parish matters, and to do her justice, she exercised the authority she possessed to the benefit both of the parish and church.

It is true there were some amongst the humbler members of the congregation who disliked the arbitrary manner in which Miss Archer entered their little dwellings, and rated them soundly on their non-attendance at evensong, or the customary Wednesday litany, or objected to having the manner in which their poor homes were conducted made the subject of discussion with a stranger ; but they soon discovered the more services they attended, the more money they got, and the better chances their wives and children had in the half-yearly distribution of clothes and other necessaries of life.



So they put up with her ways for the sake of the good things they fell into, and contented themselves with calling her an "interfering old cat," and making a grimace whenever her carriage happened to pass their way.

Miss Sarah Archer was, as I said before, of an uncertain age. She was not good looking, nor had ever been so, her eyes were small, her nose *retroussé*; but she, like her cousin Plantagenet, affected juvenility in her mode of dress—wore sashes, with large bows tied behind, and preserved a rigid simplicity of style in contradistinction to her youthful cousins. Simple muslins or small-checked silks were her forte; and she persisted in wearing her own hair, poor and thin as it was, without any addition of pads or puffs. She always prayed with her eyes closed, and the tips of her fingers joined together, generally shook her head solemnly over anything particularly touching in the old Rector's sermons, and flashed severe glances from her little green eyes on any small

delinquent caught looking behind, or tittering over its prayer book. Yet, though so sedate in church, Miss Archer was not averse to innocent amusements at home. When not in her tantrums, she entered with spirit into the projects and plans of her two merry mad-capped cousins, and conducted the household of the magnificent Plantagenet Jones in a style that caused many to have the suspicion that Miss Sarah Archer would not object to console the millionaire for the loss of his departed Matilda.

Plantagenet Jones himself took little or no notice of the religious element in his household ; he went to church on Sundays as a matter of course, and gave his sovereign in the offertory, and his hundred pound cheque at Easter. He subscribed to the choir and altar society, gave large donations to the schools, and came down handsomely for the model lodging-houses and the alms-houses for the aged poor, which he was building at the east end of

the town, and which he intended to fill with his own farm labourers, but which his daughters secretly determined should be occupied by their Ritualistic poor.

He went to church because it was the proper thing to do, and to the high church because his daughters said it was the most genteel ; but for real religion, for the spirit, that teaches humility and kindness, that delights in hidden deeds of charity, and blushes to find itself praised, Mr. Jones was as innocent as the stones of the building in which he worshipped.

“ He had a fine mind—a large mind, sir. He knew there must be some sort of religious obligation, or people would go to sixes and sevens. A certain kind of spiritual rule was necessary to keep the lower orders in subjection, but for all that mummery and tomfoolery—psha ! his ideas went with the times, and there would soon be no more of that nonsense except for women and children. He was perfectly aware of the existence of a

greater Power, a ruling Element, which kept all things straight, and watched especially over the firm of Bullion & Co. but money, sir,—money is the thing now-a-days; hang religion! a man without money is nothing in this world, and money will help him to a very good place in the next, or I am very much mistaken.”

Nobody could say Plantagenet Jones was not generous, he threw his money about as if it were so much dirt. He was always ready with his fives or tens if required by the corporation, and had done more for Rubestown than any man before him—there was not a list or subscription which his name did not head in flaunting letters; yet report said his clerks were badly paid, and there was never an instance known of a shilling being given to a poor beggar who happened to meet Mr. Jones alone. That was only a rich man’s idiosyncrasy—the poor benefited by his charity in many other ways, and if they were not satisfied, why there was the workhouse ready to receive them.

The Etheridges were great friends with the people at "Bingley Towers,"—Maria and Jane liked both Rosamond and her brother Jack, and little Mrs. Etheridge found a sympathising friend in Miss Archer, who deplored with her the untowardness of the people of the present generation, and the total absence of that spirit of deference to authority that was the characteristic of the good children in the early ages of the Church. Mrs. Etheridge looked up to her wealthy and influential friend with a species of awe and veneration, and was ever ready to back Miss Archer in all matters pertaining either to church or state.

Plantagenet Jones did not quite approve of his household's familiarity with the people at the cottage. He always objected to knowing persons who had in any way descended in the social scale; but his girls, both headstrong and self-willed, insisted on the acquaintance being kept up, and supported Rosamond Etheridge in her blunt disregard of conventionalities, generously overlooking her thoughtless criticisms on

their devotion to their Anglican principles. For Rosamond, though she sang in the choir on Sundays, could never be persuaded to rise from her comfortable bed for the early *Matin* service in the week-days, or lose a ramble in the fields for the sake of an afternoon *Litany*.

She infinitely preferred a novel from Mudie's to all the spiritual books in the world; she went to "All Saints," because she liked the singing and knew most people there, but would have equally gone to the "Little Bethel," if her friends had asked her. Still, girls were not very plentiful in Rubestown, and as Maria and Jane said, "We must know some one, and Rosamond Etheridge is a young lady!" Mr. Plantagenet Jones overlooked her poverty for the sake of her birth.

Mrs. Harrington, who lived on the other side of the town, belonged to the Low Church party, that, in spite of Mr. Jones's money, being the most influential body in Rubestown, and giving her husband the greatest number of votes; the ladies, therefore only, met in the usual course of visit-

ing, or at occasional swell and heavy dinners. Mrs. Stanley Harrington secretly hated the Joneses—she stigmatised the girls as vulgar, Miss Archer as an old hypocrite, and the gorgeous Plantagenet himself as a coarse low-minded *parvenu*.

She was intensely bitter and sarcastic in expressing her opinions to her intimates ; but, nevertheless, deemed it the better policy to keep in with the millionaire's family, and to swallow his dinners and her pride at the same time. It would not do, she thought, wise little woman as she was, to be on terms of enmity with so influential a person as the monarch of Moorshire. He would be setting up some partizan of his own to represent the county instead of her Stanley. Besides, there was not a ball or entertainment within twenty miles round, to which the Jones girls were not invited ; and it would be intensely disagreeable to be ill friends with people whom she met so frequently, and who gave such splendid receptions as Plantagenet Joneses ?

Vulgar they might be, but no one could

be long angry with the rosy-cheeked, red-haired, good-natured damsels, who would not take an affront, and never felt a sarcasm, however pointed.

What did it matter? they had no end of nice people always staying at their house, and you were not obliged to mix with them more than was necessary. She found plenty at "Bingley Towers" ready to agree with her sentiments as to their host and hostesses, and to laugh at her covert sneers and witty sarcasms, launched at their unconscious entertainers. The next best thing to eating a man's dinner is to be able to make fun of him behind his back.

Maria and Jane intensely admired Mrs. Harrington's style of dress, and mode of arranging her house, they endeavoured in vain to imitate her, but their imitations were all miserable failures; the short stout girls in their flaming silks, and thick gold bracelets and chains could never approach the quiet and elegant Mrs. Stanley Harrington in her soft clinging draperies and black lace mantilla, with the wonderful opals



clasped round her dark olive throat, the fire of the rubies reflected in her lustrous flashing eyes. They were both first rate horsewomen, yet lacked the exquisite grace with which the lithe and lissom Mrs. Harrington sat her splendid bay. They could dance capitally, were never tired of whirling their partners through the mazy intricacies of the waltz, but were nowhere when the graceful form of Mrs. Harrington was seen floating through the ball-room, her face a marvel of cool placidity compared with their flushed and heated countenances. They felt it was useless trying, they could never be like their member's wife, if they tried for years. All their father's money seemed to lose its attraction and influence when pitted against the suave manner and irrepressible style of Mrs. Stanley Harrington.

They might be the richest girls in Moorshire ; but beside the poor and plain woman who led the conversation wherever she was, and congregated around her chair the best and cleverest people in the room, they seemed completely in the shade.

It was she who was followed by a train of brilliant and wealthy cavaliers; but, though Maria and Jane saw all this, their innocent hearts never grew the heavier; they were young enough yet, and lovers would come in time. Their wealth would be sure to secure them rich, if not titled, husbands, and they did not envy the little lady her brigade of adorers; as one thing was certain—they could never marry her.

Miss Archer saw a deal, and thought the more.

That respectable middle-aged female was shocked with what she called the unbecoming levity of Mrs. Stanley Harrington.

“I wonder her husband permits it,” she said, as she watched that sleepy-headed, indolent young man with her green envious eyes. “But what can you expect, my dear,” she remarked to Mrs. Etheridge, “of a woman who never goes to church but once on a Sunday, and then to a place which is more like a barn than a sacred edifice, and where the service is mumbled out

by a stupid drone who sends them all to sleep."

It was useless appealing to the *amour propre* of Stanley Harrington. That worthy young senator regarded his wife as the model of everything excellent, and gazed with admiration at the way in which she managed her train of satellites.

He deemed himself deuced lucky in securing such a clever little woman for his partner in life, and did not feel the least inclined to put a stop to the harmless flirtations with which Mrs. Harrington wiled away the stupid time in Moorshire.

"She knew," he said, "what she was about ; he'd got the truest little woman that ever lived for a wife, and if men were such fools, as to burn their fingers at another man's candle, why, they were confounded idiots, that's all he could say."

## CHAPTER IV.

ISABEL HARRINGTON.

THIS was the place then, and these the people, to whom Sir Reginald Slade brought home his bride after the conventional month on the Continent.

Beatrice enjoyed herself immensely during her honeymoon, Sir Reginald had been so kind to her; and, never having been abroad before, everything, as a matter of course, was new and delightful. The young bride felt quite sad when Sir Reginald informed her, that parliamentary matters necessitated his return to England.

What the parliamentary matters were Beatrice never knew. He was not in the

House himself, nor did she know any one who was, except Mr. Stanley Harrington. But she was not familiar enough with her husband to ask him questions on subjects with which she was not acquainted ; so, like a good wife, she merely smiled, and said,

“Very well, Reginald, I’m ready whenever you please.”

They went down to Moorshire for a couple of months, before commencing the season in town, and Rubestown turned out its inhabitants to meet them, and bid the bride welcome. They took the horses out of the carriage and drew it to the Court, and Lady Slade passed to her future home amidst the cheers and acclamations of the people, the firing of guns, and the ringing of bells,—bells that seemed almost to deafen her with their joyous clamour.

Often, in the years that came long after, she thought of those bells, how their echoes lasted through the night, waking her up with tearful pleasure.

Catherine Hyde accompanied the bride

and bridegroom to Chesham Court ; Lady Slade having obtained her husband's permission that her sister should make her future home with them ; their aunt, Miss Betty Hyde, retiring to a small villa she possessed on the sea coast, not far from a celebrated watering-place on the outskirts of Moorshire.

It went sadly to the kind old lady's heart to part with both her beloved children at once, but Beatrice could not bear separation from her dear and only sister ; and Miss Betty thought it her duty to relinquish her personal feelings for the good of her beautiful Catherine, on whose aristocratic head she already saw the incipient stawberry leaves.

Catherine Hyde herself was in no way loth to share the good fortune of her sister. She had felt far more keenly than Beatrice, the comparative poverty to which they had been reduced, by the folly and extravagance of their father, Colonel Hyde ; and her mind had imbibed more strongly than Beatrice's

the lessons their aunt had inculcated, on the value and importance of good birth above everything else in this world.

Catherine Hyde looked upon money as a necessary evil, out of which she had been unjustly defrauded. She felt herself aggrieved by its non-possession ; but, at the same time, was perfectly aware that the want of it took nothing from her position as grand-daughter of an earl on her mother's side, or from the blue blood that ran in her veins.

She was, therefore, pleased and proud that her sister's lucky marriage had placed them both again on the eminence from which their father's fault had cast them down, and entered on her new career as sister of the wealthy Lady Slade with far more conscious superiority and pride than did the gentle Beatrice, who was almost bewildered by this sudden addition of riches.

Beatrice accepted as a favour what Catherine received as a right.

Beatrice was grateful to her husband for exalting her to the position of his wife. Catherine felt the obligation was on Sir Reginald's side, and that Beatrice's birth and beauty far surpassed the baronet's money bags. She was right, they did, but society does not always see things in the light in which Catherine viewed them. Society cares very little really for blue blood and taper fingers, society cannot manufacture dinners out of ancient pedigrees, or keep up its round of folly and fashion on an unstained name.

Blue blood is all very well when it has a yellow halo round it, but without that—bosh, red blood does quite as well when there is a good balance at its banker's.

There was quite an influx of visitors at Chesham Court the week Lady Slade came home, the Duchess of A— and her daughters came in their old fashioned family barouche. The Earl of Mountcastle, and Lord Arthur Trelawney were amongst the earliest arrivals.

The Plantagenet Joneses of course were



the first to rush to their "dearest Beatrice," their dearest Lady Slade, and overwhelm her with kisses and questions—How did she like Paris? What did she buy at Nice? How long was she going to stop in Moorshire? And would she give many parties in Belgrave Square? They were so glad to see her back again, their sweetest pet; how well she looked! and did she mean to hunt this season or not?

Lady Slade could scarcely answer; they both talked together, put so many questions, and waited for so few replies.

"They were going to give a ball, of course they were going to give a ball, in honour of her return, and no end of dinners were on the tapis to introduce the young bride into society; in fact, she would be fully occupied every day for two or three months, did she do all and go everywhere that was expected of her."

Poor Beatrice had not quite recovered from the effects of her journey, and would

have been glad of a week or two's rest ; but, no ! Society demands it of you, my dear ; people will say your marriage is not a happy one, if you do not go out—so society had to be gratified.

Amongst Lady Slade's first visitors came Mrs. Stanley Harrington and her good-natured, foolish-looking husband, who made his exit from the drawing-room as quickly as he could, under the pretence of going with Sir Reginald to look over the stables.

"It was such a bore talking to women," he said ; "they thought of nothing but scandal and fal-lals. He never knew what to say to them next, besides he wanted to be quiet, and study his speech for the House,—deuced bore that."

Mrs. Harrington had driven him over in her pony chaise, drawn by a pretty pair of greys,—Stanley being far too indolent to drive himself, and his wife rather liking the office. She now sat in her comfortable set of Russian sable, cosily beside the sweet smelling pinewood fire, while she prattled to the young bride.

"You'll find it awfully slow and stupid here, my dear," she said, in her soft plaintive voice, "after the first *éclat* of your marriage has subsided. Of all the dull counties of England, Moorshire is the dullest, and Rubestown the slowest. We would not live here at all, but Stanley is obliged to do so for the sake of his interest,—live, do I say? It is not living at all, it is vegetating."

Beatrice remarked that she was fond of the country, and did not think it at all dull.

"Ah! that is because the place is fresh to you, and at present you are the 'observed of all observers,'" replied the little lady, shrugging her graceful shoulders. "But wait a bit, my dear, you'll find it out to be what I say, the most stupid place on earth."

Beatrice smiled, "I must like it, whatever it is," she said; "I have come prepared to do so."

Mrs. Harrington opened her dark eyes. "You don't say you are going in for the goody goody lot," she cried, with an ex-

pression of pity and surprise on her olive face; "the model wife, and all that kind of thing?"

Beatrice felt slightly annoyed, yet could not tell why. "I don't know exactly what you mean by 'goody goody,' and 'model wives,'" after a little pause, "but I hope to do my duty as far as I can."

"Very proper, my dear, I am sure," replied Mrs. Harrington with a mocking smile, "but you will tire of it, nevertheless. Moorshire is not the place to practise any virtue in, except patience, and you can do that to your heart's content. You will belong to the High Church party, of course?" she added, turning suddenly round on her hostess, "and you will go to 'All Saint's,' the Joneses' great place?"

"I believe so," returned the puzzled bride; "it is our parish church, is it not?"

"Parishes don't matter, every one goes by their feelings, or their interests, here,—I belong to the Low Church, myself," explained the visitor, "not because I like

it, but Stanley's supporters affect that kind of worship; as for myself I would go anywhere, and I don't object to the high square pews, they are awfully nice if you happen to be sleepy."

Catherine Hyde, who had just entered the room, looked dreadfully shocked.

"Don't look so terrified, child, *I* never sleep, it's only Stanley does that; I alter my bonnets there."

"Do *what*?" exclaimed Lady Slade.

"Alter my bonnets, dear; not really, you know, but imagine styles to suggest to my maid afterwards—you have no idea what exquisite fabrications have come out of those stuffy old pews. The prettiest hat I ever wore in my life was suggested by the way the ivy was wreathed round the top of one of the pillars, it was a work of art—perfect, I assure you."

Lady Slade could not forbear laughing heartily. Over the lovely patrician face of Catherine Hyde there stole an expression of infinite disgust.

"I cannot imagine," she said, with the

faintest curve on her proud lips, "any one professing Christianity forgetting themselves in the House of God."

Mrs. Harrington leaned back in her settee, and gazed calmly for a few moments at the young girl from under her long dark lashes.

"Couldn't you, dear! how curious! Well, I fancy I entertained the same opinions once when I was young. It is wonderful how we alter with time," said this woman of five-and-twenty, with a mocking smile on her face. "You'll be an ornament to Rubes-town, Miss Hyde, if you continue to entertain these sentiments; but I think you will change like the rest of us."

"I hope I shall never change from what is good and true," cried Catherine, indignantly. "I should hate myself if I thought I should ever arrive at the indifference you describe, Mrs. Harrington."

"I hope you never will," replied the visitor, composedly. "It isn't a pleasant state of things."

"Now let us talk of something else.

There is to be a grand ball at Bingley, on the 27th, in honour of your arrival, Lady Slade. I don't know whatever I am to wear, you cannot get a respectable thing in this horrid place. I must send to Paris for a dress, I suppose."

"Won't that be very expensive?" questioned Beatrice, who, having always had to practise rigid economy, was as yet unaccustomed to the pleasure of wasting money.

Mrs. Harrington shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"I dare say it will, but '*que voulez vous*'; it is all very well for you who have plenty of nice dresses in your trousseau! We aborigines must use our inventive genius, or rather that of our neighbours over the water."

"Do the Joneses get their things from Paris?" enquired Lady Slade.

The little brunette fairly shook with laughter, the merry peals of her silvery voice echoing through the room. "Lady

Slade, for pity's sake don't kill me," she cried. "Have you known them so long, and not discovered their clothes to be of true British manufacture? No doubt their milliner, whoever she is, persuades them they come from Paris, but she only deceives *them*."

"I should think they are quite able to get their things from Paris, if they chose," interrupted Catherine Hyde, whose growing antipathy to Mrs. Harrington increased with the conversation: and who disliked to hear her friends laughed at.

"Of course they are!" returned Mrs. Harrington, not in the slightest discomposed by Catherine's indignant outburst. "They have only to ask to have. Old Jones, with one touch of his magic wand, could get them dresses from India, and scarves from Cashmere. I have no doubt he has heaps of such things in his treasury at this moment, but the poor girls don't know how to wear them; they have neither style, nor taste."



"They are dear good girls," exclaimed Catherine, warmly.

"Darlings ! so gushing and fresh. Don't look at me in that way, Miss Hyde, I mean what I say. I have the greatest admiration for your young companions, but you must not expect me to admire their dress, that would be too great an infliction."

"They have no mother, poor things," sighed the gentle Beatrice. "They have no one to advise them."

"Excepting their vulgar old father—pardon me, Lady Slade, he is vulgar, millionaire or not ; but the man did not make himself, and he is only a man after all. You must take those girls up," added Mrs. Harrington, with a winning smile. "Give them a little of your own exquisite taste" (with a covert compliment to the elegant toilette of the bride).

Lady Slade blushed. "I don't really see how I am to improve them, if you have failed," she said, pleased in spite of herself at the delicate insinuations of her visitor.

"I? I never tried!" replied Mrs. Harrington. "We are the opposition party, you know; besides, my dear, I'm poor; it is a marvel how I manage to dress at all on my allowance;" and she glanced compassionately down on her rich black velvet dress, with its trimmings of costly fur.

It was a marvel; and so the innocent Beatrice would have thought, had she known how little that allowance really was, and how expensive her robes.

But the bride only smiled assentingly, and gazed with admiration on the graceful form of her visitor, as she rose from her seat, and held out the tips of her daintily gloved fingers. "I must ask you to ring for my pony carriage," she said, in her soft voice. "I have stopped here an unconscionable time, but you don't know how refreshing it is to talk to any one out of the common run. One gets so tired of the good people of Rubestown, with their troubles and their platitudes," she added wearily.

Lady Slade felt quite sorry her visitor was departing, in spite of the concealed sneers in her speeches. Beatrice felt drawn towards her by a magnetic charm. "I wish you were not obliged to go so soon," she said, with an appealing glance out of her shy brown eyes.

"I wish I were not," replied Mrs. Harrington, with charming politeness. "But the fact is, we have other calls to make, and it is getting so late."

"But you'll come again soon, won't you?" eagerly questioned Beatrice, holding both her hands.

"Of course I will, my dear. We are next door neighbours, you know; your estate joins ours. Oh, I intend us to be great friends, you know," she added, looking winningly at the little bride. "I mean us to be inseparables; and you also, Miss Hyde," turning round to where Catherine—an expression of astonishment and curiosity on her face—was standing near the long French windows, "you also, when you know me better, will forgive me all my

heretical opinions. I'm not really bad at heart," continued the coquettish little woman, placing her soft fingers in Catherine's hand, and letting her dark eyes, full of penitent pleading, rest on the girl's perplexed face.

"Dear Mrs. Harrington," said Catherine, eagerly, anxious to repair the fancied injustice she had done the lady. "You mistook—"

"Did I, child? Then I'm very sorry. You will come with your sister to see me, won't you?"

Catherine promised she would. The inexpressible charm this woman exercised over all she chose, was having its effect on Catherine Hyde.

Mrs. Harrington walked gently across the room. The sweep of her sable garments had the undulating grace of a snake. "I wonder where Stanley can be," she murmured, as she stood with the bride and her sister at the window, overlooking the grounds. "He is perfectly dreadful when he gets amongst the stables. I can never

get him away. His brains run continually on horses and dogs."

"Then I am sure he will suit Sir Reginald," cried Beatrice, delightedly; "my husband talked of nothing but horses the whole time we were abroad."

"How extremely interesting to a young bride," said Mrs. Harrington.

Beatrice flushed; feeling she had said something she should not.

"I am fond of horses myself," she stammered, apologetically,

Mrs. Harrington observed her confusion, and came to the rescue in a moment.

"Are you, Lady Slade? I am so glad; they are quite a weakness with me. What a charming idea! We shall be able to ride and drive together; I shall call for you frequently. What I meant to observe was: it is so dreadful when a man has no idea but horses, like poor Stanley. You don't always wish for the perfume of the stables in the drawing-room."

"Here they come," cried Beatrice, suddenly, as the figures of her husband and

Mr. Stanley Harrington emerged from the shrubbery in front of the house.

A crimson tide swept over Mrs. Harrington's face, and her eyes glowed for an instant like coals of fire. It was only for an instant; the next moment she was as calm and self-possessed as ever.

"Just look at Stanley," she cried, indignantly; "one would think that all the world belonged to him, as he lounges along, with that indolent air. Faugh!" exclaimed the little woman, aroused for a moment from her self-possession,—*"I wish I were a man! I would make a name in the world, or I would die."*

The two men approached. Stanley with his lazy, high-bred, sleepy walk; Sir Reginald with a quick, nervous, impatient tread.

Beatrice opened the windows, and the women stood out on the terrace in front of the mansion. It was cold and frosty, but the air was bright on that February day; and Lady Slade threw a soft, white,

fleecy shawl around her head and shoulders, as she stepped out of the warm room.

"By Jove, but she's good form!" muttered Stanley Harrington, as the men came up the avenue in front of the house.

"Eh,—who? Oh, my wife. Yes, I think she'll do, after a time," replied the baronet, with a cold complacent smile.

"I should rather think she would," retorted Stanley warmly, surprised out of his usual indifference by his admiration of his friend's wife. "You are a lucky fellow, Slade; by Jove, you are."

"Stanley, dear," purred his own spouse, when the men were near enough to speak, "have you seen the ponies? We must be going, it is getting so late."

"They are coming round now," replied Mr. Harrington, pointing to where, in the distance, the pair of pretty steppers were seen trotting up the drive; then, turning to Beatrice: "I have been admiring your horses, Lady Slade. I had no idea Slade

went in for that kind of thing so strongly. You have some splendid flesh down here."

"Yes, I suppose they are nice," said Beatrice, with a little laugh, and a timid glance at her husband. "We are going to run some at the next races; are we not, Reginald, dear?"

"If all goes well, we shall," he replied. "I have a couple in training at Newmarket which I mean to enter for the autumn meeting."

"How nice," sighed Mrs. Harrington, drawing on her little pearl grey gloves. "I dote on horses myself; but we can only afford to keep four—these ponies and our two saddle hacks. I've been telling Lady Slade," she continued, turning with animation to the baronet, "that I intend to fetch her out constantly to ride and drive with me. We are going to be great friends."

"I am delighted to hear it," said Sir Reginald, bowing; "Beatrice knows so few people in this part of the county. It will be both kind and considerate of you."



"Nonsense, Sir Reginald," laughed Mrs. Harrington; "the kindness is on Lady Slade's side of the question. We are to be great cronies, are we not, darling?" she added, as she took the unresisting hand of the bride and glanced up in her face with her most winning smile.

"If you wish it, I shall be very happy," said Beatrice, gently.

Sir Reginald stood watching his wife and her new friend with a curious mixture of uneasiness and anxiety on his face. He was evidently satisfied with the result, for he smiled more gaily than usual as Mrs. Harrington kissed Beatrice three or four times before stepping into her pony carriage.

"I must say it is very good of you to come over so soon," he repeated earnestly, as he handed the little brunette into her seat and gave her the reins.

"Don't stop out, you will catch cold, dear Lady Slade," cried Mrs. Harrington, taking no notice of his speech. "Now Stanley, are you coming? Do be quick."

Good-bye, Lady Slade; good-bye, Miss Hyde; pray go in. Come, Stanley."

But Stanley was still staring at Lady Slade. When his wife spoke, he started.

"Yes, you will take cold, standing there," he cried. "How awfully stupid of me to allow you to do so. Permit me," he continued, giving her his arm to lead her back into the room she had just quitted. "Miss Hyde, may I trouble you to open the window for your sister?"

Catherine did as she was requested, gazing anxiously into her sister's pale face.

But Beatrice only laughed at their fears.

"I am as strong as a little horse," she exclaimed, glancing shyly up in the honest languid face bent so earnestly over her.

"You have no right to endanger yourself if you are," he said. "Slade will call you to account."

But Slade at that moment was arranging the fur skins round the dark fairy in the pony carriage, while she lay back, watching

his movements from under her long lashes. How it happened I don't know ; but as he did so, their hands met, and a flush swept over her olive skin.

"Is all forgiven, then, Isabel?" he whispered hurriedly, fearful lest the dapper groom might overhear what he said.

"All forgiven, long ago."

"I am so glad. I was afraid—"

"Of what? Your wife is to be my dearest friend," she laughed, showing her little pearly teeth ; but the laugh was somewhat bitter and cruel.

Sir Reginald looked uneasy.

"Have no fear, man," she cried, still under her breath ; "I don't play with weapons like those. Are you coming, Stanley?" she repeated, louder, as her tall lazy husband emerged from the drawing-room window. "I cannot hold these brutes in if you are not quick."

Mr. Stanley Harrington thought his wife intended the ponies to run away. She lashed them so unmercifully with her whip when they emerged from the avenue of

Chesham Court that he remonstrated with her for her cruelty.

“Don’t hit so hard, Isabel,” he cried; “you almost take away my breath.”

“I wish I could take away some one’s,” she muttered between her set teeth; but her reply was inaudible to her husband, who wondered what sudden fit of excitement had taken possession of his vivacious little wife.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE BALL AT BINGLEY TOWERS.

THE ball at Bingley was a great success.

Mr. Plantagenet Jones was in his element.

All the *élite* of Rubestown were there.

All the best people in the county were there.—From the Duke and Duchess of A—, down to the rector of “All Saint’s,” from the colonel and officers of the crack cavalry regiment, stationed at the chief town, some ten miles from Bingley Towers, to poor little Mrs. Etheridge and her daughter Rosamond—all were there.

The hospitable mansion of Mr. Plantagenet Jones had its rooms and portals thrown open to receive his guests, and from

the octagon chambers in the turrets, down to the great kitchens, was full to overflowing.

The ball and the several reception-rooms were marvels of decorative art. He had put them into the hands of a celebrated west end upholsterer, and a well-known florist, and the result exceeded his most sanguine expectations.

It was more like fairy land than a sober English country house—more like a brilliant tropical evening, than a cool, not to say frosty, February night. Rich exotic plants—foreign trees of wondrous foliage, lined the sides of the galleries and corridors through which the guests passed, between whose bright-green leaves the exquisite whiteness of Parian marble statues gleamed in perfect loveliness. The walls were hung with pale pink, and pale blue satin, edged with silver lace—festoons of water-lilies, terminated in stars of waxen lights, and the ceilings, arabesque and painted, rivalled the gorgeous conceptions of Titian in the Doge's Palace at Venice.

In fact, the ceiling of the amber drawing-

room was said to represent the family of the worthy Plantagenet Jones. It was mythological, portraying Jupiter surrounded by his Court.

The mighty Jove was personated by Plantagenet Jones himself, whose jolly rubicund countenance was imperfectly disguised beneath the frowning visage of the Thunderer. By his side sat the departed Mrs. Jones in the character of Juno,—stern, commanding, queenly, her peacock at her feet, her jealous eyes, flashing with invisible lightnings, turned on her rival Venus, as represented by her own daughter, the fair Maria whose fat podgy proportions were toned down by the skilful hand of the painter, and who certainly resembled the Goddess of Beauty, in the scantiness of her drapery.

The other daughter, Jane, famed for her profusion of flowing red hair, was depicted as Diana attired for the chase, and as the hair in this instance was transformed into a bright Venetian gold, it did her good service, as represented floating on the wind.

At the foot of the steps leading up to the throne of Jove, in the attitude of addressing the King of the Gods, stood Minerva, otherwise Miss Sarah Archer, her helmet surmounted by a Gorgon's head, and the owl by her side.

This was considered by the artist, and indeed by Jones and his friends, as the *chef d'œuvre* of the whole set—the likeness was perfect—the figure perhaps a little too commanding; but the resemblance of the curled snakes of Medusa's head, to the ringlets of the fair Miss Archer, was life-like in the extreme.

Plantagenet Jones was justly proud of this family group; he had taken his ideas from the ceiling in the Vatican, the Doge's Palace, and the galleries of the Pitti Palace at Florence; and as the little man, who was both intelligent and observant, lost no opportunity of turning the knowledge he obtained on his Continental tours to his own advantage, his own family were perpetuated in this allegorical group.



There were other characters and relatives, but as we shall never meet them in this story, it is needless to describe them. Rumour spoke of a grand historical painting destined to hang in the dining-room at Bingley Towers, representing the coronation of Richard the First and his Queen, but as, soon after its commencement, Mrs. Jones had taken it into her head to leave the good things of this world for the better things of the next, the character of Berengaria was at present incomplete, and the picture consequently unfinished.

The floor of the ball-room was of polished aromatic wood that emitted a delicious fragrance, when heated by the feet of the dancers. That of the retiring-rooms of mosaic marble. In the centre of one of these a crystal fountain sparkled and bubbled into a basin of alabaster, at the end of the other a miniature waterfall rushed over tiny rocks, covered with feathery ferns and bright green moss, studded with a thousand beautiful orchids.

Tall palm trees waved over seats and

bowers, curiously contrived to imitate the grassy retreats of nature—the air was heavy with the odorous scent of flowers, a cool soft breeze caused by an unseen pun-kah, gently stirred the gigantic leaves of the tropical plants, while a mellow subdued light pervaded the apartment, giving the idea of an Indian forest, bathed in delicious shade.

Each of these rooms led into the conservatories, where oranges and citrons bloomed in Continental luxuriance, and the rich purple of grapes studded the fretted roof.

Here the flowers almost dazzled the eye with the intense brilliancy of their colouring, almost overpowered the senses with their intoxicating perfume, and beyond all these were covered balconies, fitted with the softest velvet lounges, from whence the heated Terpsichoreans could enjoy the cool night air, and fairy-like prospect in the distance.

Every tree in the park that stretched out in front of Bingley Towers, had more or less coloured lamps glittering like varie-

gated stars suspended somewhere in their midst.

No matter that the branches were bare, their dark leafless arms gave a more weird aspect to the whole—every available point was covered with flags, and a grand triumphal arch was erected at the entrance gates of Bingley Towers, bearing the inscription "*Cead mille fealthe*," on the top. What connection that Irish inscription had with the entertainment no one knew, everyone there being either of Saxon or Norman descent. The bride was not Irish, nor had any of her ancestors ever been Irish—her husband was Saxon of the purest type—Plantagenet Jones was a Welshman, as his name attested.

The fact was, it was the only form of greeting in a foreign tongue, with which Plantagenet Jones was acquainted, so he insisted on having it put up as being much more appropriate and classical than the common English "Welcome." It was a great fund of amusement and speculation to

the good folks of Rubestown, who gathered round and stared at it, till their eyes ached, during the day, and shrieked with delight when in the evening it was lit up with coloured fires.

“It had summut to do wid t’ bride,” they were sure ; but what it was, “dang’d if they could mak oot.”

At all events, it looked very pretty and very imposing, standing out in bold relief against the clear bright sky, with the turrets of the feudal castle in the background. The soft eyes of Beatrice Slade filled with sudden tears of gratitude and pride, as the inscription, which she readily deciphered, met her view, and a blaze of fireworks announced the approach of her carriage.

“What a cursed fool the fellow is!” was her husband’s comment, as they passed under the triumphal arch, with its roses, its flags, and bright green leaves ; but Beatrice saw nothing of the incongruity of the quotation ; she only felt the kindness that had prompted the design.

Plantagenet Jones, gorgeous with dia-

monds and radiant with delight, met them at the top of the marble staircase, and gave his arm to the bride. Sir Reginald followed with her sister, the beautiful Catherine, who looked like some lovely "Undine," in her delicate pale blue robes, with a wreath of silver water-lilies crowning her golden hair.

A suppressed murmur of admiration ran round the rooms as the two sisters—Beatrice in her bridal white, Catherine in her diaphanous drapery—were conducted by their host to the end of the ball-room, where a sort of daïs in crimson and gold had been erected, and where the members of his family and the nobility present were waiting to receive them.

The sweet strains of music from some unseen orchestra floated through the spacious ball-room.

Dancing soon commenced, Mr. Plantagenet Jones leading out the bride; Sir Reginald claiming the hand of the fair Maria.

The scene was one of unrivalled bril-

liancy and splendour. Beatrice gazed with wonder and delight on the tableaux, the magnificence of which surpassed all she had ever before beheld, and which even the discursive reminiscences of her aunt, Miss Betty Hyde, had never approached.

And it was all for her! she was the mainspring that had set this wonderful machinery in motion, the effects of which were so marvellous and grand. She was the sun round which revolved so many satellites, each with a brilliant orbit of its own; or rather, she, with her soft pale beauty, was the moon, and these the stars adorning the splendour of that sweet spring night.

Her heart was full of almost child-like pleasure and gratitude for the kindness shown to her in her new home.

She regarded Mr. Plantagenet Jones in the light of a benevolent magician, who had conjured up these marvels for her especial entertainment, and never ceased thanking him and expressing her delight, till she observed the eyes of her husband fixed upon her with ill-concealed annoyance.

Poor Beatrice blushed and trembled. What had she done amiss ?

It was the first shadow over her happiness.

She could not get near Sir Reginald, to ask, and it made her uneasy and abstracted for a time ; but when she saw him laughing heartily with some friends, and he addressed a few kind words to her in passing, she forgot all about her momentary vexation, and entered as gaily as ever into the spirit of the evening.

The night was wearing on, and, tired with dancing, Beatrice was seated, almost alone, near the wonderful cascade, when a soft voice behind her whispered,—

“ Lady Slade—and alone ! What is the world about that it has lost its queen ? ”

Beatrice started, turned, and laughed. “ Mrs. Harrington, I have been looking for you all the evening.”

“ Fruitlessly, of course. Who, amongst yon galaxy of beauty and fashion, could possibly discover poor little insignificant me ? But a truce to jesting, my dear. I’ve

been vainly endeavouring to reach your Majesty's throne myself; the crush is so great, the people round you so dense, there is no chance for your friends."

"They are all so good and kind to me," murmured Beatrice. "It is a splendid ball, is it not, Mrs. Harrington?"

"Splendid! Did I not tell you old Jones was a wizard, and could raise all manner of enchantments by one wave of his wand."

"I am more than grateful to him. I know not how to express my sentiments," said Lady Slade, enthusiastically. "Do you know, Mrs. Harrington, you will think me very silly; but I really feel as if I should like to go somewhere and have a good cry."

Mrs. Harrington's silvery laugh rippled over and over, mingling with the plashing of the waterfall, dying away in the soft echoes beyond.

"Oh, Lady Slade, don't kill me," she cried, when she was able to speak.

"Why do you laugh?" questioned



Beatrice, slightly annoyed. "I know it is foolish, but I feel it for all that."

"Delicious innocent! Pray forgive me! but the idea of your thinking this is all done for you individually! Don't you know, my dear, the man makes use of you as a peg on which to hang his grandeur: that you represent to him so much capital, by means of which he can blazon forth his magnificence and riches to the world?"

"Ah! You take away all my pleasant thoughts; you destroy all my sentiment," replied Lady Slade, reproachfully. "Don't you think you are very unjust, Mrs. Harrington?"

"Unjust to you, perhaps, you pretty little simpleton. It might have been kinder to have left you still in your blissful ignorance, which is at once so charming and so *naive*," returned Mrs. Harrington, a vein of sarcasm running through her tones; "but not unjust to Mr. Plantagenet Jones. The man's artifices are so shallow, all the world can see through them."

"I won't believe you. People are not

so bad as that," cried Beatrice indignantly, half turning away.

"Bad. I never said the man was bad, did I? On the contrary, I think him very clever and wise. I only wish to imbue you with a little of his worldly wisdom, and I get scolded for my pains."

Lady Slade played with the long tall grasses that fell over the sparkling cascade.

"I don't want such wisdom," she said, after a moment's pause. "I don't want to think there is neither truth nor sincerity in human nature."

"As you will, *ma chere*. You will find it out yourself, by-and-by. Go on in your present illusion, thinking the world and every one in it created for you, and you alone, having you for the centre of their motives and actions, and you will one day come tumbling down with a heavy fall from your pedestal."

Lady Slade rose from her seat and bent over a cluster of beautiful exotics.

"You make me feel very humbled and ashamed of myself," she murmured, hiding her blushing face; "but indeed I believed it *was* all done for me. I knew I was not worthy, and now you have made me ridiculous, both in my own eyes as well as in yours, for being so foolish and vain as to imagine myself of so much consequence."

The brunette took hold of her hands.

"You *are* of consequence, darling," she said softly; "of far more consequence than you will ever suppose yourself. What I want you to do is to estimate others at their proper value, without which you will always be in trouble. I want to be your friend," continued Mrs. Harrington, speaking with animation; "you are so young and inexperienced. You have come amongst a set of people of whose manners and ways—forgive me—you are utterly ignorant; and I want to rescue you from the shoals which you will inevitably encounter if you do not have some careful guide."

She spoke so earnestly, so pleadingly looking up into her face, with her dark passionate eyes. Lady Slade was touched. She had been almost angry with this woman for destroying all her pretty theories, and, behold, she was the true friend, coming to help the little friendless bride.

With a sudden impulse she stretched out both her hands. "Forgive me, Mrs. Harrington," she exclaimed, penitently. "I am not used to the world. I did not know."

"I know you did not," replied Mrs. Harrington, archly. "And when I would advise you, you turn on me indignantly, and then—"

"Don't, pray, don't say any more," exclaimed the distressed Beatrice. "I am so sorry. I spoke hastily."

The brunette kissed her soft white hand. "Don't fancy I do not like the world," cried she, laughing. "I do! It's a beautiful world; and as for society, I dote on it; it's half my life. But then I know how to use it, and don't let it use me. As for the ball,

I would not have missed it on any consideration."

"Lady Slade, you are looking charming to-night," she continued, with a sudden burst of admiration. "How well that white becomes you. How soft that lace appears, seen in this mellow light, behind those lovely ferns. Ah! do let me admire you. I am only a woman, you know. You should reserve those blushes for men; they would appreciate them. I think you perfect," she added, meditatively, as Beatrice stood half-confused, half-amused, before her. "I would give anything to possess your beauty."

"Mrs. Harrington, what nonsense!"

"I never talk nonsense. You *are* beautiful, though it may not be the style most men admire—a trifle too pale, perhaps," continued this connoisseur in female charms—"just a soupçon of rouge would now—"

"Mrs. Harrington!" exclaimed the astounded Beatrice.

"Improve you immensely," went on Mrs. Stanley Harrington, taking no notice of

her companion's indignant remonstrance. "And the faintest pencil line under your eyes——"

"I would never put such stuff on my cheeks," interrupted Lady Slade, vehemently.

Mrs. Harrington regarded her with a curious expression. "Wouldn't you now? Well, perhaps it is a little too soon. Women should not, as a rule, commence that kind of thing till after thirty. A smooth skin and absence of wrinkles atone for a great deal of want of colouring."

"Paint! I *paint*! I would rather die first," exclaimed Beatrice, flushing at the very idea.

"Don't be so silly, child. You would do nothing of the sort. But you have no occasion to use cosmetics at present; those exquisite natural blushes quite do away with the necessity of artificial bloom. You will lose them after a time, and then you will tell a different story. Don't look so horrified. *I* don't paint; I only wish I could! it would be of no use on my swarthy

skin ; but I certainly would if I thought it would be the slightest improvement. You have never told me how you like my dress," she cried, suddenly jumping up from the mossy bower in which she was ensconced. "Do, there's a dear. I rather fancy it myself;" and she turned herself round and round, for the bewildered Beatrice's inspection.

Mrs. Stanley Harrington's meditations on dress had not been without a triumphant result ; whether it was the product of the stuffy old pews, the development of her own imaginative brain, or the work of the French *artiste* to whom she applied, the effect was marvellous—magnetic.

Something black, gauzy, soft, floated round her in dark diaphanous clouds, spangled with myriads of fire-flies.

At first Beatrice imagined they were artificial compositions, created to imitate life, but as she inspected them closer, she discovered they were real insects imprisoned in bags of gauze, stitched on to the dress. The heat of the rooms had deceived them

into imagining they were in their own sultry climate, and they shone and sparkled, emitting a wondrous light.

On her arms, and in the coils of her raven hair, were stars of rubies and diamonds; a large cluster of the same brilliant gems fastened her zone, and round her neck was the wonderful necklace of opals, its ruby eyes flashing with every turn.

As she stood there amidst the ferns and the grasses, and the drooping bell-like flowers, she might have been taken for the queen of the fairies—so small, so dark, so elfin did she look, the mocking smile on her curved red lips.

Beatrice was spell bound in mute admiration. The rooms were full of beautiful women; lovely forms, fit for Mahomet's Paradise, met her on every side; her own sister Catherine, fair as an angel, surpassed them all in exquisite beauty and grace; but none of them, not even Catherine, could compare with the matchless witchery of this singular woman, who had not one perfect



feature in her face, but around whom hung some undefinable fascination that partook of the nature of *diablerie*.

"Poor little creatures," cried Beatrice, touching the fire-flies with mingled feelings of admiration and surprise. "Do you not hurt them when you sit down? You must certainly crush some, Mrs. Harrington?"

"Very likely," replied the brunette, laughing. "But what does it matter, they are holocausts to fashion—victims sacrificed on the altars of Vanity Fair."

"Oh, I should be miserable," cried Beatrice, "if I had to wear such a dress."

"What nonsense," replied Mrs. Harrington, contemptuously. "They are only insects after all. . . Here they come," she suddenly continued, as a number of men appeared at the doors at the further end of the room, peering anxiously into the shady gloom of the palm trees. "Behold the charge of the six hundred! They have missed their queen, and, like bees in a hive, are going mad in consequence. Go and

enjoy your ball, *ma belle*," she cried. "You won't see many grander than this, in the course of your little existence. Don't look as if we had been talking seriously," she added, smiling. "But take the good the gods give in the spirit in which it is offered;" and with a farewell laugh, she disappeared amidst the trees, sending down a shower of petals from the crimson exotic flowers, filling the air with fragrance as she passed.

"Lady Slade, Lady Slade," cried half a dozen voices. "Where have you hidden yourself? We have been looking for you everywhere."

Beatrice rose from her mossy retreat, and advanced to meet them.

"It is the last dance before supper," cried Mr. Plantagenet Jones, as he came forward, smiling and smirking. "And I am to have the honour, am I not? I had no idea your ladyship was here."

"I came in for a moment to cool myself," replied Beatrice. "And the deliciousness of the atmosphere tempted me to stay—

what a lovely abode it is. That cascade is a perfect marvel of beauty."

"Pretty, is it not?" returned her host. "I spared no expense over it, I assure you. "Was not that Mrs. Stanley Harrington who was with your ladyship when I entered?" he questioned.

"Yes, we were talking together."

"Ah! I thought so. Delightful woman, one of the most fascinating creatures I ever met. Don't you agree with me, Lady Slade?"

"Certainly I do," assented Beatrice. "I am delighted we are such near neighbours."

"Great muff her husband, good sort of fellow, too, when you know him," went on Mr. Jones; "does very well for Moorshire at present, but they'll find the need of some more enlightened individual by-and bye."

"I suppose when that necessity arises the man will be found," suggested Beatrice, half afraid of the opinion she broached and longing to catch Sir Reginald's eye.

"Exactly, my dear lady," cried Plantagenet Jones, casting admiring glances on

her. "You have hit the very mark ; when the necessity arises the man *will* be found"—he might have added, "here," but he kept that little secret to himself—the time was not yet ripe for action.

So he led Beatrice into the ball-room and down to supper, where the splendour of the banquet rivalled the rooms they had quitted ; but alas for Lady Slade ! the pleasure had departed which she first experienced, the dew was off the flower, the bloom had left the peach, everything around was apparently unaltered, but to her it was no longer the same, the serpent had crept into her Paradise leaving its trail on the flowers, and the leaves, and the happy human hearts. It was the second shadow on her evening's enjoyment.

## CHAPTER VI.

“COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS  
BEFORE THEM.”

CATHERINE HYDE was the centre of a circle of admiring men and women, grouped near one of the large oriel windows.

Lord Arthur Trelawney leaned over her chair, criticising the company with the ease and freedom of a man of the world, making her laugh, despite her natural dislike to amusement at the expense of others, by his witty remarks and careless sarcasms.

Maria and Jane Jones both hovered near their friend, admiring her beauty and dress, and with their usual unselfish generosity diverting the attention of their own cava-

liers to the superior attractions of the lovely Catherine.

"Isn't she beautiful!" cried Maria in an audible whisper to the man with whom she was dancing.

"Well—hum—haw—wevy," replied the gallant Plunger, languidly stroking his fair moustache, and looking at Catherine as he would at a horse.

"And she is going to live always at Chesham Court, and she'll set Moorshire mad," went on the enthusiastic champion of Catherine's charms.

"Weally—haw—pleathant for Moorshire."

"Isn't it now? and she can ride and hunt almost as well as we can."

"Weally—shouldn't have thought it," remarked the astonished Plunger, who did not look astonished by the way. "She looks too fwagille for that sort of thing—too bwittle you know."

"Do you think she would break?" laughed the merry Maria.

"Well—haw—not exactly," returned the Plunger, vainly endeavouring to fix a glass which kept bobbing about in his right eye. He never explained what he did mean, but Maria Jones appeared to understand him, and continued her catechism. "Won't she make a sensation in the Row in the season?"

"Shouldn't wonder if she did."

"They will go up to town, of course. Lady Slade will be presented on her marriage."

"Weally, of courth."

"I shall never be surprised to find Catherine the belle of the season," continued her devoted admirer.

"Haw, not if *you're* there. Haw," whispered the Plunger with a simper at his own wit.

"Stupid!" laughed the buxom damsel, as the music commenced and she whirled him off on another prance.

Three turns round the room brought Maria and her Plunger back to the same

place, where the gallant officer seated his partner on a satin couch, he standing in front mildly mopping his face with his delicate handkerchief and tugging at his moustache.

"Dwedful pathtime, dancing ; almost as bad as a widing-school."

"I think it delightful," said Maria, fanning herself with a Chinese fan of painted feathers. "But you don't mean to say you go to riding-school now, Captain Vivian?"

"'Pon honour do—awful bore, intheth it—ought to be put a stop to. If a fellow knows how to wide, he knows how to wide," remarked this logical scion of the aristocracy.

"I should say he ought," replied Maria Jones, glancing up at him from over the top of her fan.

"Demmed shame. Beg pardon, but our Colonel inthiths on the widing-school three times a week, thometimes oftener."

"Oh dear, how dreadful."

"Ithn't it now," said the gallant captain, quite delighted to see the sympathising



looks cast upon him by his fair consoler, and taking a chair by her side.

"But that's nothing to intpection days. Have you ever been at an intpection, Mith Jones?"

Maria replied she did not know what an inspection was, but she had once been at a review.

"Haw—well—an intpection ith a small weview, a weview of a fellah's own wegiment, when a thwell fellah comes down from town to find fault."

"What a shame," cried Maria, turning her blue eyes full on her companion.

"It was dwedful when I was in the 71st Hussars," went on the Plunger, charmed to find a feminine listener to his military grievances. "We were worked for weeks before the intpection came off, till I was just like a tkeleton, and then the fellah that came down thwore at us all, and bullied our Colonel dwedful, and thed we were not any better than yeomanwy!"

"How shamefully cruel," murmured Maria.

"We did him, though," cried the Plunger, smiling blandly over the recollection of the event.

"Did you, now !

"Yeth, we did."

"What did you do ?" questioned Maria, fully anticipating the account of some dreadful judgment visited on the head of the offending general.

*"We gave him a thplendid lunch !"*

The young lady's blue eyes expressed the utmost astonishment—she evidently did not understand the joke.

"Haw—yeth, we did—haw," continued the gallant Captain ; "and by Jove! wathent there a weport of us went up to the Horth Guards—it thaved the wegiment, it did."

Maria smiled—"Why didn't you stop in the Hussars, Captain Vivian ?"

"Why you thee," said the Plunger, confidentially, *"I wathent quite sure the weport was wight,* and it was loothing catht you know to stop with fellahs who did not know how to wide."

"And you like the Dragoons better ?"

"Like them? They are thplendid! Doothed expenthive tho', but our meth is the finest in the cavalwy. The Guards can't hold a candle to our band, you mutht hear our band, Mith Jones."

Maria declared that she would be delighted.

"You muth get your papa to bring you to Barchester, there will be an inthpection in the Spwing—you can hear our band then."

Miss Jones promised she would use her influence with her father, and induce him to come to Barchester.

"And I'll look out for you, and get you cloath to the flag thtaff—beth pothition you know."

"How kind you are," murmured Maria, her eyes meeting the vapid blue ones of the Plunger.

"I'th a plethure, pon honour," he replied, squeezing one of her little fat hands.

"What an idiot that fellow is," said Lord Arthur Trelawney in his soft low

voice, as he directed Catherine's eyes towards the pair.

"Yes!—why?"

"Because if he wears Her Majesty's uniform, he ought to speak Her Majesty's English—and of all the confounded nonsense you ever heard a man utter, commend me to Captain Vivian."

"He's a man of good family too, is he not?"

"Family yes—he's a nephew of old Lord Richard, but that does not hinder his being a fool—it's my belief he could speak as well as you or I if he chose."

"I suppose," said Catherine smiling, "he thinks it pretty to lisp."

"Polly Jones seems to think it pretty too!"

"Lord Arthur Trelawney! Polly Jones."

"Didn't you know we called her Polly? I forgot you were new in this part of the world, Miss Hyde!"

"I don't like to hear men speak disrespectfully of my friends."

"Beg pardon, won't offend again—well,

*Miss Jones* seems to think it pleasant—shouldn't wonder if it were to be a match, she is just the style for a military life."

Catherine half turned and looked at the speaker, she could not tell from his tones, if he were jesting or not, the dark handsome face was smiling at her, but wore no expression save one of amusement.

"I hope if she marries him, he will make her a good husband," said Catherine, warmly.

"He's sure to do that, military men always do—don't you know the proverb about reformed rakes, *Miss Hyde*?"

Catherine looked slightly annoyed.

"If he is a connexion of Lord Richard, he is most likely well off," she said, after a pause.

"Not a stiver—poor devil, all his money goes on his regimentals, and his mess expenses. What does that signify? *Jupiter* has plenty, and what fitter consort for *Venus* than *Mars*," he said, with a covert sneer at the painted ceiling.

Catherine *Hyde* could not forbear smiling.

“Look at Mars, now, how carefully he is pulling that silky moustache, no doubt he is telling the fair Poll—beg pardon, Venus, all about his warlike campaigns—how like Desdemona she hangs upon his words, see! he is calling a brother officer to introduce, take care Mars, or Adonis will cut you out.”

“What nonsense you talk, Lord Arthur,” exclaimed Catherine Hyde laughing.

“Do I not? It’s my trade, my profession, talking nonsense to pretty women—excepting your own fair self, whatever other language do they understand?”

“You except me, and yet talk nonsense to me, that is a distinction without a difference, Lord Arthur.”

“Pardon me, till this evening, I was not aware that you were superior to the rest of your charming sex; superior in beauty you have always been,” added he, bowing with courtly grace—“but the charms of the mind have to be learnt to be appreciated.”

Catherine Hyde felt disconcerted, this

man with his dark handsome face, his suave manners, troubled her because of the sarcastic ring in the high-bred tones of his low sweet voice.

She wished he would move away from her chair. "I dislike compliments, especially open ones," she replied colouring.

"Said I not so? Was I not right when I proclaimed you superior to the rest of your sex? Perhaps, Miss Hyde, you have been satiated with them; compliments, however true, nauseate you. One wearies even of good things in time, like the Cornet who said at his first mess dinner he had been so bored with good wine he preferred bad—shouldn't wonder if that wasn't our friend Vivian now."

Catherine tried to look grave, but could not.

"There didn't I tell you so—Venus has taken Adonis's arm, and left Mars in the lurch. What devils those fellows are, always trying to cut each other out."

"The officer you call Adonis, is Captain

Vivian's greatest friend, Major Fitzbrace, he is in the same regiment," said Catherine.

Lord Arthur laughed sarcastically. "And you call them friends. Oh, Miss Hyde, how innocent you are ; shall I tell you where Captain Vivian would like best to see his dearest friend ? taking possession of his ancestral estate, a piece of territory, six feet by two feet six ; don't look so horrified," as Catherine uttered a faint cry—"it's the way of the world—the greatest friend stops the promotion of the regiment, and Vivian, for all his braggadocia about the jolliest fellow on earth, would secretly like nothing half so well, as to command the firing party over that fellow's grave."

"What dreadful things you say," cried Catherine, turning pale at the very idea.

"Fact, I assure you. Shall I tell you what the army is, Miss Hyde, apart from its glitter and show ? it's a school in which each man is trying to overreach the other—in which each man regards those above him as so many interlopers, keeping him



out of his fancied rights. Talk about brotherly love, and *esprit de corps*, there is nothing of the sort—the happiest moments of their lives are those in which they see a brother officer's name in the obituary or gazette."

Catherine Hyde turned round on the cynic, indignation flashing out of her beautiful eyes.

"I do not believe you," she exclaimed—"my father was an officer and a gentleman, and but for his one fault, the noblest man on earth. Sir, do you dare to tell me, the service that produces such men as he, is not what I've ever believed it, the finest in the world? Would you have me think the gallant, high-minded officers who were *his* companions and friends would ever stoop to such thoughts and actions as you represent? Fie upon you, Lord Arthur, I will not listen to you any more."

Lord Arthur Trelawney sank back in his soft fauteuil, smilingly regarding the flushed and agitated girl.

"Beautiful enthusiast," he whispered, "it

is worth while broaching any opinion, were it only to hear you refute it. I forgot for a moment your father was one of the gallant corps. Forgive and forget ; it is scarcely the subject for a ball-room, I own ; let us talk of something else. See, Mars has soon consoled himself for the loss of Venus. Who is that queer little girl with whom he is waltzing,—the girl with the pale face and towy hair ?”

Catherine glanced at the couple indicated.

“ I do not know,” she said.

“ She is only a child ; but what wonderfully soft grey eyes, what light and expression in her mobile face. I do not remember seeing her before. Where the devil can Vivian have picked her up ?”—this in an undertone to himself.

“ Oh, I know now,” suddenly exclaimed Miss Hyde, a faint curl of contempt on her beautiful red lips ; “ Jane Jones introduced her as we entered the room. She is a Miss Etheridge ; her mother is the wife of a poor officer ; they live somewhere in Rubestown.

It is her first ball, I believe," continued that young lady, supremely indifferent.

"It is easy to see that," replied Lord Trelawney. "Just look with what spirit the child is entering into that dance; one never sees such a sight in a London ball-room."

"There is Beatrice," said Catherine, after a pause, not at all interested in Rosamond's movements.

Lady Slade was just entering the room on the arm of Plantagenet Jones.

"Then it is the last dance before supper, and Cræsus is to have the bride. See how he smiles with conscious pride; how his jolly rubicund countenance is irradiated with delight. Happy Plantagenet! descendant of a race of kings. Miss Hyde, I am to have the honour of this quadrille. I envy no man his partner now."

The supper was gorgeous, like everything else about that remarkable entertainment, and after supper the dancing was resumed, with far greater spirit and *eclat* than before.

People met people they had not seen at the beginning of the evening—new friends, new acquaintances, were made. Men became more tenderly familiar under the influence of champagne, and women were no colder for their little tastes of jelly and their little sips of wine.

The dowagers and *chaperones* were all the better that their inner woman had been comforted and sustained. They crowded together in coteries, in the corners of the rooms, and pulled the reputations of their friends to pieces, as a sort of dessert after that sociable meal.

The men hung about the retiring rooms and doorways, in a way that men have of doing during the small hours.

There were numberless buffets stationed here and there, where gentlemen might take their fair partners to be refreshed with an ice or a glass of wine during the dancing; but the men, from shamefacedness, had seldom troubled those buffets. But now, as it were, they had "tasted blood," and relays, or detachments, of the

“lords of the creation” were to be found in these snuggeries just taking another refresher before “that confounded waltz begins.”

Amongst these men Sir Reginald Slade and Stanley Harrington were conspicuous. Stanley—big donkey as he was—boasting for ever of the House, the speeches he made, and the speeches he didn’t make, but intended to—which were by far the more numerous—and voting balls and entertainments a “bore,”—“things devised by the devil to keep a fellow out of bed when he ought to be in it; for what does a fellow want in the country but to go to bed. He was forced to sit up all night in London; and, by Jove, sir, it’s no sinecure, sitting up all night in the House.

“Dancing,—he hated dancing. Fit only for a lot of Hottentots. He thought those countries much more sensible where they hired people to dance for them. He had gone through a quadrille when they first came into the room, just for appearance sake; but it had nearly been the death of him.

He left dancing to his wife ; she could do enough for both of them. And, as for women,—didn't see any woman worth a second look, except Lady Slade, and there was no getting near her."

He little knew at that moment Beatrice was standing alone in the conservatory overlooking Bingley Park.

Sir Reginald Slade, who had imbibed as much wine as was good for him, was the centre of a little knot of men, who, despite their evening-dress, had a certain horsey appearance. He was discussing, with much animation, the probable starters for the next Derby, and expatiating on the merits of the animals he meant to run in the autumn at the Rubestown races.

He was hot, flushed, and excited ; and when the inviting notes of a gallop summoned most of the men back to the ball-room, said he would have just another split soda, and join them in a second.

Lady Slade had been dancing until she was fairly exhausted. With the exception of her rest in the waterfall room with Mrs.

Harrington, and the hour during supper, Beatrice had done her duty like a true born English woman,—danced with every one whom she felt she ought, and a great many more to whom she was under no such obligation ; for, in spite of the shadow Mrs. Harrington had cast over her joy, Beatrice could not help feeling and acknowledging the ball *was* for her, and that the whole of the company, from the great Jones himself to the Duke of A——, had their thoughts and attention concentrated on the timid unsophisticated bride, whose cheeks were by this time almost as white as her dress.

Beatrice had a loving grateful heart ; and was not above being delighted by the magnificent entertainment given in her honour. As for Mr. Jones's private intentions, what had she to do with them ? his public ones were to give her pleasure : and pleased she felt, in spite of everything.

One thing only troubled her : her husband's apparent indifference and unconcern. From the first dance, in which he was in the same set as herself, she had scarcely

ever seen him, except at a distance. He appeared to be enjoying himself as much as she ; he smiled at her kindly whenever she passed,—but there was something wanting. She wished to share her pleasure with him,—foolish little bride ! She wanted to whisper her delight in his ears, to draw his attention to this thing and that, to have him direct her attention to objects of interest, to see his looks of approbation at her being made, as she was, Queen of the Revels.

It was beautiful, it was fairy-land, but it lacked the life in the statue, the pulse in the heart, it wanted the warm pressure of her husband's hands, the loving light in her husband's eyes, her soul longed for his soul even among the follies of the world.

Stupid little woman, why long for what the man does not possess ?

She turned away in meek resignation. "It was not high-bred ; it was not good style she supposed for husbands and wives to mix together in fashionable society. She



would get used to this kind of thing by-and-by, and be able to go her way with the same indifference as the men and women around her. In the meantime she must not vex her aristocratic husband by any outward exhibition of her old-fashioned ideas." So she asked the Duke of A——, with whom she had been dancing, to take her into the retiring room, for she felt tired and weary, and then to fetch her husband and sister, as it was high time now they were taking their leave.

The Duke, with the courtly grace of a peer of the realm, apologising for leaving her alone in the almost deserted room, hastened away to fulfil her behest.

Beatrice sat for awhile, and then, suddenly turning faint, went through the conservatory out into the covered balcony overlooking the park.

She was quite worn out, poor child—she was so unaccustomed to so much display and dissipation. It had been a hard night for her; so many to dance with, so many to

talk to, it was over at last. She had danced all her dances, said all her pretty sayings, she was only waiting now to lay her tired little self down to sleep, and dream it all over again.

She leaned over the balcony, the cool air fanning her aching brow. It was still dark on that early spring morning, the flickering variegated lamps on the trees in the park were dying out one by one, the flags on the triumphal arch looked listless and drooping as they flapped lazily backwards and forwards. Behind her the lights of the castle gleamed as if Bingley Towers was on fire, the sound of music came softly and sweetly through the curtained doors. She could see the shadows of the dancers reflected on the windows, the noise of revelry and merriment reached her ears by fitful gusts. Beneath her lay the ornamental gardens of Bingley Towers, a thick shrubbery interspersed with shady walks intersecting them here and there; the murmur of voices reached her from below and unconsciously Lady Slade looked down.

Two figures, evidently preferring the cool night air to the heated and overcrowded ball-room, were emerging from the shrubbery, engaged in earnest conversation. The gentleman was bending so low over his companion that Beatrice could not distinguish him at all, but there was no mistaking the lady. Her light musical laugh rippled out on the air, the fire-flies gleamed and glistened on that dark undulating form, the lustre of the opals was perceivable even from the balcony.

"How strange," thought Lady Slade, "for Mrs. Harrington to choose such a place as that for a private conversation, when there were plenty of quiet nooks in the house. Could it be Stanley who was with her?"

A turn in the path brought the pair right in front of the balcony, under the light of a waning lamp. Beatrice started and caught hold of the cushions on which she leant. "Surely she knew that studied walk, that quick nervous tread, that fair hair."

“Could it be Sir Reginald—her own husband, who was walking in the shrubbery with that dark fascinating woman?”

The back of the man being turned towards her, she tried in vain to recognise his face. She could hear the murmur of their voices, but could not distinguish a single word.

“What could her husband have to say to Mrs. Harrington, that Beatrice might not hear? and if it were he, why was he bending so tenderly, so familiarly, over her? Why was she hanging so lovingly on his arm?”

A strange sensation of giddiness and pain came over the little bride. She uttered a moaning cry like that of a wounded animal. She turned sick and would have fallen, when a voice beside her exclaimed :

“Lady Slade, shall I get you a chair? Don’t you feel well?”

She turned, startled back to life by the voice, it was that of a girl almost a child, with a pale eager face and large frightened eyes.

"Yes! a chair, quick! The heat overcame me, I think," cried the agitated Beatrice, pressing her hands to her burning forehead. "Who are you, child? where did you come from?"

"I am Rosamond Etheridge," replied the girl, looking at Beatrice with wonderful pitying love. "Miss Hyde asked me to come and see if you were here. I hope I did not alarm your ladyship. They are all waiting, and the Duke of A—— is in *fits*."

"In fits, child! Oh! I hope not," cried Lady Slade, starting to her feet in terror.

"Not really, you know," replied Rosamond, laughing, "but terrified because he has lost your ladyship. I knew where to find you if he did not," added Rosamond, nodding knowingly.

"Did you?"

"I've watched you all the night!" cried Rosamond, earnestly. "Oh, Lady Slade, pray do forgive me."

"Forgive you for what, my poor girl?" said Beatrice with a wan smile, casting one

nervous look over the balcony. The couple had disappeared.

"Beatrice! Beatrice!" cried the voice of her husband close beside her, "where have you hidden yourself? I wish, my dear, you would not do such outrageous things, the carriage has been waiting half-an-hour; we have been seeking you everywhere."

"I did not know," faltered the bewildered Beatrice as she took his arm, "I thought you——"

"You shouldn't think!" he cried, in an angry whisper. "Recollect, Lady Slade, every eye is upon you. You cannot afford to absent yourself like this."

"It was only for a moment, Reginald," murmured Beatrice, the tears starting to her eyes at his cross words, and her conscience reproving her with her unjust thoughts.

"It was not *he* then. How foolish, how wicked had she been to think so."

"I felt faint, dear Reginald, and the Duke said he would fetch——"

"Oh, madam! are you there? I am

charmed, delighted. I was in a perfect agony when I found you had flown," exclaimed the Duke of A——, as Beatrice and her husband emerged into the open room, and a bevy of friends surrounded them. "Permit me to escort you to your carriage."

"Pardon me, your grace ; all other things I accede, but this is my privilege," cried Plantagenet Jones, bustling up pompous and fussy, almost pushing the aristocrat away in his haste.

"Permit *me*, Lady Slade."

Beatrice, quickly recovering her composure, smilingly took his arm.

"Make way for my Lady Slade, good friends. My Lady Slade's carriage stops the way !"

## CHAPTER VII.

### LIFE AT FERN COTTAGE.

"WELL I never was at a nicer ball in my life."

"No, mamma!"

"Never, Rosamond, not even in the palmiest days of the 200th. I really must say Plantagenet Jones spared no expense to make the thing go off well, and it did him credit."

"It was simply delightful," said Rosamond; "I think I shall never forget it, I'm so glad, mamma, we were asked."

"My dear, they could have no justifiable reason for leaving us out of the invitations," replied Mrs. Etheridge, drawing herself up



proudly; "it would have been a positive insult, had they done so."

"Oh, mamma, Maria and Jane would never have insulted us; I did not mean that, but there were so many grantees there one could scarcely expect——"

"My dear Rosamond, you are talking nonsense as usual, those people are no better than ourselves, simply because they have money and a handle to their names."

"Well, I'm glad we went," said Rosamond hastily, fearful lest her mother should get on her favourite topic, and dreading a dissertation on good birth and breeding; "the girls were very kind to me, and I am young you know to go to a ball."

"Decidedly you are, my dear, but you look a great deal older than your age, you are taller than I was at fifteen, and I don't think I ever grew after fifteen."

Mrs. Etheridge and Rosamond, the morning after the ball at Bingley Towers, were sitting in the best room at Fern Cottage, which Mrs. Etheridge called the drawing-room, and her friends the front parlour,

It was a pretty little room, for Mrs. Etheridge possessed a good deal of taste in the arrangement of her household gods, and there was an air of refinement over the shabby genteel furniture, that made you regret it had not a larger sphere of action. To-day the small sitting-room presented a rather untidy appearance; the trophies of last evening's engagement were strewn about on the chairs; a fan, a smelling bottle, a little scarlet opera cloak, (Rosa-mond's property), were in one corner of the room, while a bundle of warmer wraps, an imitation gold bracelet, and a pair of pink satin boots, betokened where Mrs. Etheridge had rested her tired little feet, and set her corns at liberty.

The ladies on this occasion were in loose dressing-gowns, poor Mrs. Etheridge looking pale and sickly, from the effects of the unaccustomed dissipation, but Rosa-mond fresh as a daisy—her eyes sparkling brightly with the recollection of her past enjoyment.

"It was a delightful ball," reiterated

Rosamond with marked emphasis, "I wish I were going again to-night, for I am sure I should never be tired of dancing, mamma."

"Ah, I told you how it would be," cried Mrs. Etheridge, with a knowing smile and a nod at her daughter. "I knew, young lady, you had only to go into society to appreciate the pleasures of it; you see now how perfectly right I have been in struggling on, to keep things together. If I had not made an effort, Rosamond, you would never have gone to Bingley Towers."

"Dear old mother," cried Rosamond, kissing her, "you were indeed good to allow me to go, and I am sure that white dress of mine must have cost you a great deal."

"Never mind what it cost," replied her mother with a satisfied air, "it will have to last you many times more, there is nothing nicer for a young girl than white, and your scarlet ribbons set it off greatly."

"Fancy old Archer getting herself up

in white," cried Rosamond, with a contemptuous laugh, "and a mauve sash too; was there ever anything so ridiculous?"

Mrs. Etheridge looked annoyed. "I do not see the ridiculousness," she said, standing up for her friend; "white is becoming to all ages—Lady Slade was in white."

"Lady Slade! the bride, why she cannot be more than three-and-twenty, and old Archer is fifty if a day."

"Rosamond, Rosamond, I will not have you speak of people in that low and vulgar manner, recollect that Miss Archer is my friend, and to be treated with proper respect."

"I beg pardon, mamma; I forgot for a moment she was your friend, but the idea of comparing a hideous old maid to Lady Slade, the loveliest woman on earth," and Rosamond clasped her hands with the exuberant enthusiasm of youth.

"Dear me, Rosamond, how you do exaggerate!" exclaimed her mother; "Lady Slade is not bad looking; who would be,

with all that lace and diamonds on them? but she is not fit to hold a candle to her sister. I have seen many beautiful girls in my time, but I never saw one to equal Miss Hyde; she looked like an angel last night, with all that lovely golden hair flowing down her back; why Lady Slade is *wishy-washy* beside her."

"Catherine Hyde's not bad," replied the pert Rosamond, "but she's too cold and proud to suit my taste. Maria and Jane tell me she is always like that, thinks nothing of nothing."

"My dear! what grammar."

"Well, you know what I mean," replied Rosamond tartly; "you are not remarkable for grammar yourself, mamma," added this amiable daughter.

"If I am not, it is not your place to correct me," retorted her mother, flashing on her an indignant glance, "but it is exactly like you, Rosamond, you will never cure yourself of this shocking habit of answering."

"I don't suppose I shall," said Rosamond,

carelessly, as she poked the fire and took up her book ; " however, mamma, I don't think Miss Hyde is to be compared with Lady Slade."

" A child's opinion is not worth having," Mrs. Etheridge remarked, with an angry sneer, naturally put out by her daughter's rudeness, after which trite observation, both mother and daughter relapsed into silence.

They were aroused from this pleasant position of affairs, by the sudden entrance of the one female domestic, who did duty at Fern Cottage, and who was never very remarkable for either cleanliness or politeness ; she burst upon their reverie by announcing that the ring at the bell, which had been unnoticed by the refractory couple in the drawing-room, was caused by the advent of the tax-collector, who made his third application for the poor's rate, and moreover signified his intention of not calling again."

Mrs. Etheridge jumped up in a state of nervous trepidation.

"Oh, dear me, Rosamond, what shall I do?" she exclaimed, forgetting her quarrel with her daughter in her new anxiety; "I haven't the money in the house, why did you let him in?" turning round sharply on the maid-of-all-work.

"I could not help him, ma'am, he would come in," replied the terrified domestic.

"Would come in? what nonsense!" cried Mrs. Etheridge, pressing her hand to her forehead. "Oh, Rosamond, Rosamond, whatever shall we do?"

"I'm sure I don't know, mamma," said Rosamond, looking anxiously at her mother.

"You never know anything; you can never help any one out of a scrape."

"Don't talk so loud, mamma—the man will be sure to hear you," cried Rosamond in a half whisper.

But Mrs. Etheridge had been struck with a brilliant idea. "I know what to do," she said. "Here, Harriet, go and tell the man that the ladies were at the ball at Bingley Towers last night, and cannot be disturbed."

The idea of expecting one to be up at this hour of the day—twelve o'clock!" she added, indignantly.

"How could the man suppose we were at the ball?" laughed Rosamond, when the servant had departed on her errand. "It's the last place I dare say he thought *we* should be at."

"He will find out his mistake, then," replied her mother, drawing herself up proudly; "and will learn to treat us with a little more respect in future. There he goes," she cried, as peeping behind the curtain, she watched the form of the discomforted tax-gatherer retreating down the gravel path in front of the cottage. "He is soon dismissed. Well, Harriet," as that grinning individual re-entered, her appearance rendered more ludicrous by the addition of black smuts on the side of her nose, "you have got rid of him. What did he say?"

"He said as how he shouldn't wait no longer than Monday, ma'am."

"The impudent fellow; but you gave him



my message, didn't you? You told him we were at the ball at Bingley, didn't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And what did he say to that?" cried Mrs. Etheridge, swelling out in conscious importance beneath her faded Cashmere dressing-gown.

Harriet glanced at Rosamond, who, amused at the whole affair, was lolling back in her arm chair, her hands behind her head. "He said, ma'am," hesitated Harriet.

"Well? What? You are not deaf, are you?" cried Mrs. Etheridge, who was convinced she had got the tax-gatherer, as Shakespeare has it somewhere, "on the hip."

"He said, ma'am, *he didn't believe as you was!*" blurted out Harriet, retreating to the kitchen.

Rosamond burst into a fit of boisterous laughter.

Mrs. Etheridge threw a glance of indignant contempt on her daughter, and proceeded to gather up her various pieces of

finery before retiring to her bed-room, when another loud peal at the front bell arrested her midway in the passage, and sent her flying back in trepidation to the sofa she had just quitted.

"Whoever can that be?" she exclaimed. "Say we are not at home, Harriet," she continued, in a low whisper, as that young woman emerged from her den at the back of the cottage, vainly endeavouring to secure the crochet d'oyley she called her cap, on the top of her untidy head.

Mrs. Etheridge was wise in her generation, and feared the information of her being at Bingley the previous night might not take more effect on the new comer, than it had done on the tax-gatherer.

"Keep back, do," she cried, in an agonized whisper, as Rosamond, with the heedless curiosity of youth, was advancing to the window. "They'll be sure to see you, and will insist on coming in. Get behind the curtains, there's a good child, if you must look. Oh, dear me," peeping out herself, "what a fool that Harriet is. Why

doesn't she send the man away? What is the use of her standing arguing there? She will be sure to let out something, if she doesn't come in."

But the poor little woman's agony was destined to be worked up almost to a frenzy, for the imperturbable Harriet, with the gate open half way, seemed to be determined on having a regular confab with the mysterious visitor.

All her mistress could perceive from her station of observation was, that the girl was first quarrelling and then laughing with her interrogator.

"Who was it? What kept you so long, Harriet? Why did you not come in?" were the questions with which the girl was assailed, when, after a lapse of moments that seemed ages to the frantic woman, she returned to the cottage.

"Please, ma'am, he wouldn't go."

"He wouldn't? Who was he?"

"Why, Larking's the grocer's young man. He said the bill had been owing for six months, and his master wouldn't give

no more credit. He said you must send him summut to-day."

Harriet stood eyeing her mistress with the cool insolence of low vulgarity.

Mrs. Etheridge turned first crimson and then pale. "What shall I do, Rosamond?" cried she, when the girl had departed again to the kitchen.

"Can not you send him something, mamma?"

"Impossible, my dear. I've only fifteen shillings in the world; and I don't know what I shall do if your uncle does not answer my letter soon. There's this man to-day, and the tax-man on Monday, besides all our other expenses."

Rosamond rocked herself backward and forward — her usual manner when annoyed. "It's awfully tiresome, mamma. It's a dreadful state of things to be in."

"It is, my dear," returned her mother, fretfully. "But I cannot help it now. The thing is, how are we to pacify that dreadful man? I must write him a letter. Here,

Rosamond," she added, "I feel so tired, you might just write to him for me."

"Very well," said Rosamond, sullenly rising and getting out her desk, with no very gracious air. "What am I to say?"

"Say, my dear?" replied Mrs. Etheridge, meditatingly. "Say that I've received his message, and am sorry to keep him waiting, but that I am in daily expectation of a remittance from India; and as soon as it arrives, he shall have a cheque."

"But you're not, are you?" questioned Rosamond, putting down her pen and looking at her mother. "Didn't papa send the allowance last month?"

"Will you write what I tell you, miss?" cried Mrs. Etheridge, stamping her foot, and flushing crimson beneath her daughter's glance. "Things have come to a pretty pass, when children can call their parents to account."

"Oh, mamma! mamma!" exclaimed Rosamond; but she wrote as her mother dictated, nevertheless.

The girl rose up and walked to the window, her eyes full of mortified tears. "Was it worth it all," she thought, "all the misery, the degradation, the shame? Was not the splendour of the previous evening dearly bought by the bitterness of such scenes as these?"

Oh, Society! Society! What an *ignis fatuus* art thou! What a will-o'-the-wisp, dancing for ever before the eyes of thy votaries, leading them on to folly and sin—perhaps to destruction.

Rosamond Etheridge was young, and her fits of annoyance soon over. The sight of her little scarlet opera cloak recalled the pleasurable reminiscences of the previous night. From the windows of Fern Cottage could be seen, though the garden was enclosed, the distant road winding up the hill that led to Chesham Court, and Rosamond's thoughts naturally flew to the lovely woman who had spoken so kindly to her at the ball.

"Dear Lady Slade," she murmured, tapping with her fingers on the glass. "I

wonder, mamma, if she has ever suffered as we do? She looked so pale and mournful, though all that] grandeur was for her."

"You may depend upon it she has," replied her mother. "You have no idea to what straits genteel people are sometimes reduced in order to make an appearance in society. I dare say, if we only knew Miss Betty Hyde, we should hear a fine tale of the various shifts she was put to, in order to bring out those two girls; however, I must say they do her justice," added Mrs. Etheridge, decisively.

"Poor Lady Slade! how I pity her," was Rosamond's comment.

"Pity *her*, my dear!" almost shrieked her mother; "with all that fine property, and a good-looking husband too. It's Miss Betty who has to be pitied, if anyone has. No doubt she's living in cheap lodgings in London, if the truth were told. But I think the girls ought to take care of their aunt, if there *is* such a thing as gratitude in girls,"

said Mrs. Etheridge, with a meaning glance at her daughter.

Rosamond was quite accustomed to these side stabs from her mother, so took not the slightest notice of that lady's observations, but continued to gaze up the distant road.

"There's the Slades' carriage," she suddenly cried; "I know the livery, mamma. How early they are out; it's only two o'clock. They must be coming into the town."

"And we are not dressed!" exclaimed Mrs. Etheridge, in dismay, glancing down at her dressing-gown and then at her daughter. "If we had only been ready, we might have been out in the garden, and then they must have seen us. Lady Slade has never returned my visit, and it might have given her a hint."

"It's Lady Slade and Miss Catherine Hyde," cried Rosamond, from her position of vantage; "and oh, mamma!" continued the girl, excitedly, "I believe they are



coming here. They are,—the carriage has stopped. There's the visitors' bell !"

" Oh, what shall we do ?"—pouncing like a thief on her several articles of attire, and clutching them up in her arms. " Rosamond, you really ought to have been ready before this !" turning fiercely on her bewildered child. " Just look at your hair ; how untidy you are !"

" Perhaps they won't come in ; only leave cards," replied Rosamond, in a hurried whisper, nearly knocking her mother down in her anxiety to pass her on the stairs.

Mrs. Etheridge tumbled over her dress.

" Don't make such a noise, Rosamond ; they will hear you. Oh ! they will be sure to come in," she cried, in agony, peeping over the bannisters on the landing. " That fool of a Harriett has no tact. She would never dream of saying we were tired. Yes, here they are !" she added, with a faint scream, as the sweeping robes of the ladies were perceived close to the cottage door. " Be quick, Rosamond !"

And mother and daughter nearly tumbled over each other in their eagerness to reach their respective rooms.

"You get dressed first, and entertain them until I come down," said Mrs. Etheridge, slipping off her dressing gown, and fighting with her back hair ; " I'll be as quick as ever I can."

"All right, mamma : they won't expect us in apple-pie order, after last night."

"It's a queer day to come,—just after the ball," cried Mrs. Etheridge. "What a fluster it puts one into! Here, Harriet," as that young woman appeared, holding two cards in her grimy fingers, "give me my black silk dress ; it is soonest put on. Where did you put them?"

"In the drawing-room, ma'am," replied Harriet, in a gruff undertone.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! Was there ever anything so unlucky?" cried Mrs. Etheridge, struggling violently to get her dress to meet. "There goes a button,—and I have got my old stays on, too—I shall never get it fastened. It's the first day

I have ever been caught like this. Oh, Rosamond!" she screamed, as, white with terror, she sat down on the edge of the bed.

"What is the matter, mamma?" cried Rosamond, rushing towards her, fearful her mother was hurt.

"Oh! I have left my best chignon on the top of the arm-chair, just where I took it off last night," exclaimed Mrs. Etheridge, looking at her daughter with an expression of horror. "Oh! what shall I do? They will be sure to see it."

Rosamond's fright exploded in fits of smothered laughter, in which she was joined by the grinning servant.

"You go down, Harriet," said Rosamond, when she could speak; "tell the ladies we shall be with them in a moment, and try if you cannot hide it under your apron."

"And my gold bracelet is there," cried the agonised matron, "and if they should look at it they will see it *isn't* gold, and it has such a *brassy* sound. Oh, Rosamond,

are you not ready? I'm in such a fluster. Do go down, there's a good girl."

"All right, mamma," cried the girl, in a hurried whisper, as she ran to her own little dressing-room.

Mrs. Etheridge succeeded in getting into her black silk dress, after pulling open all her drawers and turning the contents on to the floor, in order to find a collar and pair of cuffs to match, and making a noise over the heads of the visitors as if some one was removing all the furniture in the room.

She then descended to the drawing-room, putting on a face of as much unconcern as she could, and endeavouring to appear not got up for the occasion.

Here she was doomed to a fresh addition of horror,—for, on the sofa, close to Lady Slade, sat Rosamond—her hair smooth, certainly, but in the identical old dressing-gown she had worn in the morning, examining her mother's bracelet with Beatrice Slade.

"I thought I had better run down as I was, mamma," she said, as the visitors rose

to shake hands with her mother. "I was sure Lady Slade would excuse me, when I told her we were indulging after last night's dissipation."

"It is we who ought to apologise, Mrs. Etheridge," said Beatrice, advancing, with a sweet smile, to where the poor woman stood, trying to conceal her dismay. "It is too bad of us to intrude on such a day; but the fact is, we were coming into Rubestown, and I had never returned your kind visit."

She spoke so gently, so kindly, holding both the little lady's hands in her own, Mrs. Etheridge would have been at peace directly, had it not been for the proud, half-scornful smile on the face of Catherine Hyde.

As it was, she blushed, and stammered out a dozen excuses for not being ready to receive them, and for the untidiness of the room.

"If you say any more we shall go at once," said Lady Slade, anxious to put her at her ease.

"Oh, don't do that," cried bold Rosamond.

Lady Slade looked kindly down on the girl's eager face, and touched her pink flushed cheeks, while Mrs. Etheridge went through a frowning pantomime, behind Miss Hyde's back, intended to reprove her daughter for her forwardness.

"What a pretty little cottage this is," said Beatrice, advancing towards the French window, "the prettiest in Rubestown, I fancy. Do you know, Mrs. Etheridge, it puts me so much in mind of my own dear home before I was married, it was not a bit larger than this; was it, Catherine?" turning to her sister.

"A little, perhaps," replied Miss Hyde, glancing superciliously over the garden; "ours was in a different style: I do not see the comparison."

The haughty tones in which she spoke added not a little to Mrs. Etheridge's confusion. Lady Slade laughed quietly. "I think it is very—Catherine," she said, "but I am in the habit of seeing likenesses where

other people don't," she added, unwilling to let Mrs. Etheridge feel pained by her sister's manner. "Rosamond has been telling me how much she enjoyed the ball. Did she tell you how kind she was to me?"

"Kind! Lady Slade," exclaimed Rosamond, devouring her idol with her large grey eyes.

"Yes, kind child; I believe I should have fainted, had you not brought me a chair, the heat was so intense."

"It was such a pleasure," murmured silly Rosamond.

"We are going down to All Saint's," said Lady Slade; "we have promised to meet the Joneses there; they are anxious I believe to enrol us in one of their sisterhoods."

"They seem to do a great deal of good," said Miss Catherine Hyde, thinking it was about time she made a remark.

"Oh, no end of good," replied Mrs. Etheridge, her eyes wandering nervously round the room to discover if anything was amiss. "Miss Archer is a sweet woman,

and spends her whole life in the service of the church and poor."

"She could scarcely spend it better," said Miss Hyde.

Rosamond's face was a study.

"You sing at All Saints', do you not?" questioned Lady Slade, turning to the girl.

"Sometimes," replied her mother, speak for her. "I am sorry to say, Lady Slade, Rosamond is not half so religiously inclined as I could wish."

Catherine Hyde looked proudly severe.

Lady Slade smiled, "I'm afraid Rosamond and I shall agree," she said; "I am not at all religious myself."

"That is no reason you should boast of it, Beatrice, if you are not," interrupted Catherine sharply.

"Well, darling, I suppose not," replied her sister gently, "but it doesn't alter facts."

"Facts are not always pleasant things," said Catherine, a shade of annoyance on her lovely face.



"Mrs. Etheridge, do you belong to the Dorcas Society?"

"Oh, yes," delightedly responded Mrs. Etheridge, quite charmed that her beautiful visitor should condescend to address her.

"Oh, then you can tell me something about it."

"I can tell you all you wish to know," replied the officer's wife; "but I fancy Miss Maria Jones would be a better exponent, she understands the ins and outs of everything connected with it."

"Dear Maria," sighed Catherine, "she is indeed a good girl, a wee bit too worldly perhaps."

"Well, poor things, they have to get married, you see," said little Mrs. Etheridge, "and they could not do that if they were at All Saints' all day."

"Certainly not, it is very praiseworthy of them to do all they do. I am delighted we have come to live so near them."

"You will be a great assistance in the good work, Miss Hyde," ventured Mrs. Etheridge.

"I will try and add my little mite," said the fair Catherine, blushing sweetly, "but I fear it is only a little, it is a great pleasure," she added, "to find congenial spirits to work with."

"There is ample scope for all in Rubes-town," suggested the officer's wife; "it is the poorest, and the wickedest place on earth."

"It is, mamma, look at all the public-houses," exclaimed Rosamond, having caught a thread of the discourse.

Mrs. Etheridge frowned.

Catherine Hyde's beautiful eyes looked as if they would annihilate the offender. "We must all of us join in a crusade to render things different," she said to Mrs. Etheridge, ignoring Rosamond altogether; "so much can be done when people unite; for my part, although it was to do honour to my sister Lady Slade, I could have wished last night half that money had been given to the poor; it seemed such a waste to me."

"Oh, Miss Hyde," cried Mrs. Etheridge, not knowing what else to say.

"It always seems such a shame," continued the lovely enthusiast, "to give dinners and suppers to people who can get them at home. I should like to give dinners to those who cannot afford them, who never taste such things as entrees and trifles."

"They would be sick if they did," cried Rosamond, growing bolder every moment under Lady Slade's kind glances; "fancy old widow Horrigan, with some of that whipped syllabub or orange soufflé we had last night."

"Oh, you dreadful girl," laughed Lady Slade.

"Rosamond!" exclaimed her mother, reprovingly.

Rosamond only laughed, twirling her mother's sham bracelet round and round on her finger, to the mortal terror of Mrs. Etheridge, who expected every moment to see it fall on the floor.

"I think we ought to be going, Beatrice," said Miss Catherine Hyde, rising, her face the picture of haughty disgust, "it is getting quite late," looking at her little enamelled watch, "and we have so much to do."

"I have been arranging with Rosamond," said Lady Slade, "to come and spend a day with me at Chesham Court, if you will allow her, Mrs. Etheridge."

The mother's face shone with proud satisfaction.

"I shall be delighted, honoured. Rosamond, have you thanked her Ladyship?"

"There are no thanks necessary," hastily replied Beatrice; "it is to be a mutual pleasure, isn't it, Rosamond?"

The girl's grey eyes were fixed on her in grateful worship.

Beatrice saw their expression and smiled.

"Very well, it is settled then. Let me see, to-day is Tuesday. Will Friday suit you?"

"Any day will suit her, Lady Slade," cried her pleased and happy mother.

"Think of yourself, do not allow her to interfere with your arrangements."

"I have none for Friday," said Beatrice, consulting her tablets. "I want Rosamond to show me a little about the place. I know scarcely anything of Rubestown or its environs."

"Rosamond can do all that," said Mrs. Etheridge, "she knows every hamlet and village for miles round, and all the people, too."

"Then she will be the very person for me," laughed Beatrice, "a sort of female Speke."

It was settled then, and the two ladies took their leave, Beatrice giving Mrs. Etheridge a pressing invitation to come and see her soon.

"I shall want all the friends I can make," said she, with a pensive look in her soft brown eyes. "I know no one intimately, except the Joneses and the Harringtons. I want everyone to like me if they can," she added, with a winning smile.

"That will not be very difficult," replied

the gratified little woman, "everyone must like you, Lady Slade."

"I don't see that," returned Beatrice, and as she spoke her eyes rested on the upturned face of Rosamond Etheridge; "there is one who loves me already," she thought, "but she is only a child."

"I like that girl," said Lady Slade, pursuing her meditations when the carriage drove away from the cottage; "she is so original."

"It is to be hoped she is," replied Catherine, dryly; "I don't like her at all!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE LITTLE BROWN MERINO.

It was a great day for Rosamond Etheridge and her mother, when she went to Chesham Court. From the moment Lady Slade left the cottage, till Rosamond started off in a fly from the "Black Eagle," Mrs. Etheridge never ceased talking about the coming event.

The poor little woman saw all her dreams and anticipations about to be realized, and her daughter launched into that society, which was her ideal of all human happiness.

To think that after all, Lady Slade, about whose advent Rosamond was so perversely indifferent, should be the very person to take her up, and not only that, but that Rosa-

mond, who disliked everybody, and scarcely treated her friends with common civility, should have been seized with this wonderful infatuation for Lady Slade, was a state of things that almost passed Mrs. Etheridge's comprehension.

Rosamond, of all people in the world, the girl who had been hitherto more like a young bear than a civilized maiden of the nineteenth century, to be going simply mad over the goodness and beauty of a Baronet's wife, who, in the eyes of her mother, possessed no greater attractions than her title, her handsome house, and her well-filled purse. Attractions quite sufficient to render her a most desirable acquaintance, but not to account for the rhapsodies and ecstasies displayed by the self-willed Rosamond.

However, girls will be girls, and Mrs. Etheridge was only too pleased to see her refractory daughter taking an interest in anything likely to conduce to her future advantage, to stem the torrent of praises and admiration, that flowed unceasingly from Rosamond's lips.



At times a pang of something like jealousy would cross the poor mother's heart, as she heard expressions of love and devotion, (never applied to herself), fall from the unthinking girl. She would sigh in her foolish maternal fondness to see how soon a stranger, with a few sweet words and a winning smile, could win from her daughter affection, that she had struggled and striven for so many weary years to obtain; apparently all in vain, for Rosamond, up to the present time, had treated her mother almost with indifference, only giving way at odd moments to spasmodic expressions of love and gratitude, which were as effervescent as they were enthusiastic.

The mother consoled herself with thinking that this sudden fancy of her child might be as little lasting as any of her other vagaries, and that the best way was to "Make hay while the sun shone," and turn this freak of the wayward Rosamond into some profitable channel.

Lady Slade had evidently taken a great

liking to Rosamond Etheridge. "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune," and the fond mother fancied she saw the path open before her child, which, if seized on at once, might lead to prosperity.

Lady Slade was, by her rank and position, a far better chaperone for Rosamond than the two flighty Joneses, whose kindnesses were fitful in the extreme, and whose invitations few and far between. They came frequently to the cottage and met Mrs. Etheridge and Rosamond at church and Dorcas meetings ; but Mrs. Etheridge was never asked to Bingley Towers, except on grand occasions, to swell the number of their guests.

For all their good nature and familiarity Mrs. Etheridge could not help seeing the Joneses patronized her.

The poor little woman, who, with all her scheming and poverty, *was* a lady, felt the smart at times very bitterly. She said nothing to Rosamond, of course ; on the contrary, reproved her daughter whenever

she made fun of the girls or their father.

She strove with all her might and main for Rosamond to be invited to the ball at Bingley Towers, and was continually in terror lest Rosamond, by any of her thoughtless abrupt sayings, might offend people of such importance as the Joneses; but she nevertheless often winced at the *cavalier* manner in which she and her daughter were treated by the thoughtless off-hand moneyed girls, whose vulgar parent *her* father would not have tolerated inside his doors.

Mrs. Etheridge was a weak-minded little fool, no doubt, and her strong-headed daughter had a very good idea of the fact: but that did not prevent her possessing the natural feelings of a woman.

A great deal of her sensitiveness was doubtless owing to the natural nervousness and weakness of her character. She made imaginary troubles where none existed, and magnified those that did into avalanches, which threatened to overwhelm her at every turn.

She suffered as only such characters can suffer—none the less bitterly because she was a fool.

Is it always the great sorrows of our lives that are hardest to bear ?

People will talk and tell us of some terrible grief that has turned their joy into mourning, their light into darkness ; that has crushed them to the earth beneath its overwhelming force. If we meet these people a few years after, in all probability time will have softened their dreadful sorrow, whatever it might have been ; smiles will irradiate the faces that once seemed plunged in perpetual gloom.

It is the minor worries of existence, the constant stinging of the gnat, that wear the life away ! that eat away the heart strings the greater blow is powerless to sever.

Mrs. Etheridge had been in a perfect fever of agitation ever since Lady Slade expressed her desire to have Rosamond at the Court.

No sooner had the ladies departed than

the mother's first thought was, what was her daughter to wear.

Rosamond's wardrobe was at all times a scanty one ; and now at the end of winter her dresses were beginning to look very shabby. Rosamond was careless and extravagant. She never thought of changing her costume when she came in-doors, or wearing an older one in the house. She liked to put on a dress and wear it out.

"What is the use of keeping one's clothes?" she said. "I'm still growing, and they will become too small and old-fashioned for me."

There was some sense in her remarks, but none in tearing her things and never repairing them. None in spilling grease over her skirts and never taking it out.

Her mother would storm and scold in her feeble little way, but it generally ended in the girl wearing her best dress, and her mother having a good cry to herself in her bed-room.

"I won't have a Sunday frock like a tradesman's daughter," cried pert Rosa-

mond. "I'm a lady; and ladies wear the same clothes Sundays and week days alike;" in which theory her mother was obliged to acquiesce, though the practice did not hold good in Rosamond's case.

But now, when it was a question of visiting a lady of rank, poor Mrs. Etheridge was at her wit's end how to make Rosamond present a becoming appearance. There was no time to make a new dress, even if she could afford to buy one, which she could not; and Rosamond's old brown merino was scarcely fit to show in before the mistress of Chesham Court.

Mrs. Etheridge turned out her own small stock of finery, and insisted on Rosamond, much to her disgust, trying on the whole *repertoire*.

"We can easily have one altered for you, my dear," cried her mother, throwing over her daughter's head a black watered silk—once the pride of the grand field days of the gallant 200th. "I don't think that would look so bad, Rosie, with a little alteration."

"My dear mamma, do you want me to look like a grandmother at a fancy ball?" laughed Rosamond, strutting up and down the room, and glancing over her shoulder at her train. "I only want a blond lace cap and a pair of mittens to be perfect."

Mrs. Etheridge smiled; her daughter's saucy face looked anything but like a grandmother's. "Perhaps it is a *leetle* too old," she said, doubtfully. "Try this one, Rosamond." This one was a crimson tabinet, trimmed with a profusion of dirty white bugle lace.

"Oh, mamma!" shrieked Rosamond.

"Be quiet, my dear. Do let me have my way, and don't you be so obstinate. I am sure this will fit you very well, if the sides are taken in, and the sleeves altered."

"I won't wear it," cried Rosamond, pushing it away in disgust.

"Why not? You aggravating girl, I tell you it will do very well. I can take some of that lace off, and then—"

"It looks as if it came out of an old clothes shop," exclaimed the indignant

Rosamond. "I won't be made such a Guy for anyone."

"Then you will have to stop at home," cried her angry mother, almost ready to cry with vexation. "If I am willing to lend you my beautiful things, surely you ought to be willing to wear them."

"It is very kind of you, mamma, but I am not going to be made a fright of, even for Lady Slade. I shall go in my old brown dress."

"*What!* that thing you wear every day?"

"Certainly. Lady Slade will have to see me in it hundreds of times. It is better to begin as we intend to go on. What is the use of us pretending to have fine clothes if we haven't? There will be plenty to tell her how poor we are," added the girl, bitterly.

"It is impossible! You cannot go in that dress," cried her mother. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! What shall I do? And there's no time to get another made."

"It will do very well indeed, mamma," said positive Rosamond. "Do listen to



reason. Harriet shall give it a good brushing, and I will put a nice clean frill round the neck and sleeves, and I can wear my little gold cross. I am not to be there till twelve ; and after lunch we shall go out for a drive, and then it will soon be dark. It does not look bad at all by candle-light. I'm sure it will do, mamma."

"You are very obstinate, Rosamond," cried her mother. "I'm sure you are going mad. But if you do not mind the disgrace, I don't see why *I* should care. How can you tell whom you will meet there?"

"I don't care whom I meet. No one who was not at the ball, I suppose ; and they could see I wore an expensive dress last night," replied Rosamond, tossing her head.

"Well, Rosamond," said her mother, rather mollified at this suggestion. "I suppose you must have your own way, as you always do. But I might trim it up a little for you. I have some beautiful old Chantilly lace, that was given me by your poor dear grandmamma, years ago ; *that* might

improve it," she continued, meditatively, holding up the frock in question for examination.

"You shall do no such thing, mamma," exclaimed Rosamond, snatching it from her. "Fancy Chantilly lace on an old brown merino! Lady Slade would think we had gone demented."

"She would do nothing of the sort, you perverse disagreeable child," retorted her mother, putting away her discarded robes.

Rosamond gained the victory, not, however, without many more struggles on her mother's side, who vainly endeavoured to persuade her to wear a black velvet circular cloak, trimmed with Maltese lace, instead of her own little cloth jacket, and who positively insisted on inserting a pale blue feather in Rosamond's brown straw hat—much to the girl's annoyance.

The effect was not bad, however, when finished, and it was a happy roguish face, that looked out of the fly, and nodded adieu to Mrs. Etheridge, as the carriage drove off to Chesham Court.

Lady Slade received her with great kindness, and Rosamond soon forgot, if indeed she remembered at all, her mother's anxieties concerning the little brown dress.

Beatrice herself was almost as plainly attired; a walking costume of light coloured home spun, fastened at the throat, a white linen collar and plain gold brooch, completed her simple toilet.

There was no other person present, except Lord Arthur Trelawney (who was staying in the house) and her ladyship's sister Catherine Hyde.

Miss Hyde was certainly in morning costume, but it was one of studied elegance. A dove-coloured Cashmere, trimmed with white swan's-down, and soft pink ribbons, floated around her graceful form, and her lovely hair was confined in a golden net.

For Catherine Hyde knew that she was beautiful. It is only in books that virtuous young women are unconscious of their attractions. Miss Catherine Hyde was as

proud of her beauty as the veriest coquette on earth, and lost no opportunity of enhancing her charms.

She did not care for Lord Arthur Trelawney; on the contrary, she rather disliked him, but he was a man, and was therefore bound to succumb to her beauty, so Catherine Hyde arrayed herself in the most becoming style of morning *negligé* her French maid could devise, and descended to the morning-room, determined on subduing her visitor.

To a certain extent she succeeded—for Trelawney was a *connoisseur* in female charms, and the exquisite loveliness of this fair languid woman delighted the eye of the man of the world. His practised glance took in every atom of her toilette in a moment, and a smile of approval crossed his lips, as he rose to hand her a chair.

He felt convinced that all this preparation was for him, and with the overweening conceit of his sex, felt proud of this tribute to his superior attractions.

He was wrong—Catherine Hyde would have dressed herself as perfectly if she had been going to receive a tradesman. It was part of the woman's natural character, never to be seen at a disadvantage; she cared no more for Lord Arthur Trelawney than she did for her sister's groom. He was a man, and she was beautiful—that was the whole secret of the affair.

“Beatrice does such ridiculous things,” she cried in a tone of annoyance, as Rosamond's fly was seen coming up the drive, and Lady Slade went out into the hall to receive her guest. “Fancy her asking that child at Fern Cottage to spend the day here! I suppose we shall have all the little beggars in the village next;” and the haughty beauty's lips curled with contemptuous scorn.

“What! The girl with the grey eyes, who enjoyed the ball so much; I am delighted, we shall have such capital fun;” and Lord Arthur threw himself back in his chair, and chuckled with pleasure.

"I don't see the fun," said Catherine, coldly.

"Don't you? That girl is an original, I'm sure of it; we will have her in and draw her out."

"I fancy you will not gain much by that manœuvre," replied Miss Hyde. "From what I have seen of the young lady, I do not think she is a subject to be drawn out."

"No? It will be all the better fun then; but who in the world is she? A lady or a beggar? You suggested both just now;" and Lord Arthur glanced at Catherine, with his mischievous black eyes.

Catherine Hyde was not the least disconcerted.

"She is both," she replied quietly. "Her father is a poor officer in India, I believe, and her mother just manages to keep body and soul together."

"Poor devil—she has plenty of companions in that little trade," cried Lord Arthur with a bitter laugh; report said his Lordship was often at his wit's end to make both ends meet.

"And what is Lady Slade's attraction to the girl?" he resumed.

"I don't know," replied Miss Hyde. "I believe like yourself, she thinks Rosamond Etheridge an original, and the girl has taken a fancy to her, or something of the sort. Beatrice is so silly, she believes all people say to her," added this worldly wise young lady.

"And *you* do not, of course?"

"I should be very foolish if I did," cried Catherine, laughing and colouring at the remembrance of the very pointed compliments she had allowed him to pour into her ears.

"Wise young woman," commented Lord Arthur, with the faintest possible sneer on his countenance when he spoke.

Lady Slade and Rosamond now entered the room; Rosamond had taken off her hat, and the wind had blown her fluffy hair all about her rosy little face. The girl was blushing with excitement, which improved her appearance, for she was apt to look too

pale at times, and a slight colour lightened up her large grey eyes.

Catherine Hyde just held out the tips of her delicate fingers; but Lord Arthur Trelawney bowed as though he were receiving a princess, and brought forward a chair for the agitated girl.

"May I get you something? A glass of wine?—or a biscuit? the luncheon is not quite ready," he said.

"No thank you, sir," replied poor Rosamond, nervously.

"Don't say *sir*, Rosamond, that's like a shop girl," cried Catherine, in an undertone, sharply.

Rosamond wished herself out of the room, especially as she fancied she detected a smile on the handsome gentleman's face; her ears burned and her face flushed scarlet. Beatrice came to her *protégée's* relief.

"Have you quite recovered your fatigue from the ball?" she asked. "How is your mamma, my dear?"



"Mamma is quite well, and she sent her love—no—her kindest regards to your ladyship," cried trembling Rosamond, making it worse and worse every moment; "and I was not fatigued at all, Lady Slade."

"I am sure you were not," interrupted Lord Arthur Trelawney. "I watched your dancing, and I never saw anyone enjoy themselves so much in my life."

Rosamond wondered if that was wrong, she had an indistinct notion of her mother telling her well-bred people never showed any emotion in society—was the dark gentleman laughing at her? She looked him full in the face with her large fearless eyes. "It was my first ball," she said simply, "and I did enjoy myself very much; I was never at anything so nice before."

"You were perfectly right in doing so," said Lady Slade, gravely; "unalloyed pleasure comes to us but seldom in this life."

She was thinking of the shadows that had crept over her own enjoyment on that memorable evening.

"You live in Rubestown, Miss Etheridge?" questioned Lord Arthur.

"Always. We are too poor to live anywhere else till papa comes home," replied Rosamond, gradually recovering her self-possession.

"And will Colonel Etheridge return soon?"

"Papa is not a colonel; he is only a captain," said Rosamond, determined to fight him with her own weapons. "I hope he will not come back just yet."

"No? May I ask why?"

The girl was silent. How could she reply truthfully without revealing something of the anxious life at home?

"Papa has not yet got his promotion, and does not wish to return until he has," she said, at last.

Lord Arthur Trelawney felt sure this was not her real reason, but was too much of a gentleman to distress this little country girl unnecessarily; so he rose, and placed a chair for her at the table—on which the butler had just laid luncheon—between

himself and her hostess ; the fair Catherine occupying the opposite side.

Here Rosamond was in a fresh dilemma.

Fish came on. She took up a fork and a piece of bread, as she had been accustomed to do at home ; when, to her horror, she perceived her companions were using the silver knives that she supposed were intended for dessert.

In her confusion, she dropped her bread on the floor, and was stooping, covered with blushes, to pick it up, when Lady Slade said, kindly,—

“Never mind, Rosamond, ‘Fido’ will be glad of that. Higgs, get Miss Etheridge another piece of bread.”

“Chablis or Sauterne, Miss ?”

Here was another difficulty.

She had never before heard so much as the names of these wines, and, in the rapid way in which the butler pronounced them, quite forgot what he said.

She turned round timidly.

“A little out of that bottle, if you please,”

pointing to the one with a long neck and silver cork.

The man poured it out gravely; but poor Rosamond was overcome with confusion on meeting Miss Hyde's well-bred stare from the other side of the table, and the mischievous twinkle in Lord Arthur's eyes.

"Oh, dear! I wish I hadn't come until after lunch," thought the poor child, almost choking herself with cayenne pepper, which she had taken in absence of mind. There was a whizzing noise in her head, and her heart palpitated violently.

The fish was followed by *entrées*.

Here Rosamond felt herself quite at home, for she had tasted these at the Joneses; but, after taking some of a delicious sweetbread, covered with fragrant white sauce and garnished with mushrooms, she was dismayed at perceiving Miss Hyde, her plate empty, gazing at her with severe condemnation in her looks.

What could be the matter now?

She glanced at Lady Slade. That lady was enjoying her sweetbread with a knife and fork, like Rosamond.

A hot feeling crept up her back ; her ears tingled.

"Surely it could not be the proper thing to use a spoon." She peeped from under her long dark lashes sideways at Lord Arthur Trelawney. That gentleman was leisurely wiping the white sauce from off his black moustache.

She was not doomed to remain long in ignorance.

"This is simply delicious," cried Lord Arthur, helping himself to more of the sweetbread. "Miss Hyde, you are not taking any,—let me persuade you. Higgs, take the sweetbread round to Miss Hyde."

The beauty drew herself up in offended dignity.

"Lord Arthur, this is *Friday*," she said.

"Well ; what of that ? I know it is," he replied.

"I never eat meat on Friday."

"Don't you? Beg pardon. I think you're to blame; but I was not aware of your scruples," replied Lord Arthur Trelawney, quietly helping himself to game.

"I knew you were not, or you would not have asked," returned Miss Hyde, her eyes still rivetted on the conscious Rosamond.

"I do not expect persons *apart* from us to observe the Fridays; but one looks for it from members of one's own congregation."

"I thought only Roman Catholics fasted on Fridays," remarked Lord Arthur, with a sly glance at Lady Slade.

"I wish people would understand the difference between fasting and abstaining," retorted Catherine, still severely stern,—  
"Abstaining is going without flesh meat; fasting is going without food altogether."

"It will be a long time before they get me to do either," replied Trelawney, laughing. "Don't you agree with me, Miss Etheridge?"

Rosamond, who had now discovered the

cause of her offence, murmured, "she did not think it any harm."

"I imagined you belonged to 'All Saints,'" cried Miss Hyde, trying to annihilate the offender with her looks.

"So I do, Miss Hyde," stammered Rosamond.

"Well, I should not have *supposed* so," retorted her tormenter.

"You see she belongs to 'All Sinners,'" laughed Lord Arthur, secretly delighted at the discomfiture of the lovely Catherine. "Have another piece of this pheasant, Miss Etheridge; it is the last you will get this season."

"Don't tease the child," cried Lady Slade; "let her enjoy her lunch. What a torment you are, Catherine, with your Fridays and your fasts. God meant us to eat everything that is good, or He would not have sent it. Go on, Rosamond dear, and never mind them. The carriage is ordered at two for our drive."

Rosamond Etheridge was overjoyed when the carriage drove up, and she took

her seat in it next to Lady Slade; Miss Hyde and Lord Arthur preferring to ride.

A great deal of her timidity had worn off under the increasing kindness of Lady Slade, and she felt quite her free frank self again as she sat beside her new found friend, away from the mocking glances and haughty sneers of Lord Arthur Trelawney and Catherine Hyde.

She found courage even to steal her hand into the sealskin muff of Lady Slade, and returned the warm pressure of her ladyship's fingers, and she chatted and talked about Rubestown, its inhabitants, and its manners, as if Beatrice and she had been school companions, instead of a high-born married lady and a wild little country girl.

There was many a merry laugh issued from the stately barouche as they drove through the lanes and over the moors, and Rosamond pointed out to her companion all that was worth seeing or knowing about that part of Moorshire.



It was a bright spring afternoon, the hedges were bursting into pale green buds, the wheat just peeped above the ground, and the wayside banks were studded with clusters of primroses and early violets.

Rosamond clapped her hands with delight as they passed whole patches of these, and cried "Oh! oh!" to the great amusement of Beatrice, who, but for fear of the impassible powdered footman and coachman on the box, would have stopped the carriage to allow her young companion to gather a posy of the sweet wild flowers.

"Never mind, Rosamond," she said, as Rosamond turned regretful glances on the pretty simple things. "When the summer comes we will have some picnics in Chesham woods, and will gather as many wild flowers as we please."

And Rosamond turned a loving look on the gentle high born lady who liked the fields, and the flowers, and the simple things of this life as dearly as she did herself.

It was a very charming country that sur-

rounded Rubestown. That ancient town lay in a valley encompassed by hills on every side, and the fresh breezes from the moors caught the fair faces of the two occupants of the carriage, and crimsoned them with life and health. Their drive took them through woods, where the now leafless branches met overhead, but where the tall dark firs and cedars, and the ivy and mossgrown trunks relieved the otherwise barren aspect of the place. Then out into sweet country lanes, skirting the various parks and homesteads, diversifying and enlarging the prospect as they went.

Rosamond prattled away in her gay and careless manner, telling the history of this place, the legend of that, inducting Lady Slade into her new territory with the unthinking freedom of a child, who discussed the people of whom she spoke with little regard to their morals or their manners.

As the travellers emerged from out the shadow of a dense wood (which Rosamond confided to Lady Slade was famous for

nuts) they came suddenly upon a man who, leaning over a stile, was surveying the adjacent fields with absorbed attention.

As the sound of the carriage wheels rolling over the soft turf reached his ears, he turned and respectfully taking off his hat held it in his hand till the ladies had passed.

He was a man of apparently forty years of age, dark eyes and hair, a strong, well knit, manly figure. He was dressed in a suit of shooting clothes of some woollen material, such as gentlemen usually wear in the country, and the hat he held in his hand was of felt, the shape commonly called a wide-awake.

All these things Beatrice observed at a glance, and when the carriage had passed turned to her companion and asked, "Who is that gentleman, Rosamond?"

"Gentleman! He isn't a gentleman," exclaimed Rosamond, laughing. "Is it possible, Lady Slade, you do not know? He is your own steward."

"I have never seen him before, and he

*looks* like a gentleman," said Beatrice, blushing slightly at her mistake.

"He is not, he is '*Out of Society*,' you know, but your ladyship must have seen him often; he was one of those who presented the address when you first came to Chesham Court," exclaimed Rosamond.

"Very possibly, my dear, but I saw so many people then I have almost forgotten them all."

"He's been ever so many times up at the Court to see Sir Reginald," went on Rosamond.

"I never notice my husband's visitors, and I should scarcely be likely to notice his steward," replied Lady Slade proudly, half-annoyed with herself for remarking a person so totally inferior to her in position.

"He's not bad-looking for an old man," continued Rosamond, glancing back to where the steward, hat in hand, was still gazing after the carriage.

At this observation Lady Slade laughed.

"An old man, Rosamond? he did not appear old to me," she cried.

"He is, though," replied Rosamond. "He must be forty if he is a day, and his mother is the dearest old woman in the world."

"Do you know them, Rosamond?" asked Lady Slade, but quite indifferently; the existence of her husband's steward was to her a matter of supreme unconcern.

"Know them! I should think I did," replied the girl with enthusiasm. "They have the finest strawberry gardens near Rubestown. Jack and I (when Jack's at home) go constantly there in the summer, and we eat as many as ever we like, and as much cream, so thick and delicious, as ever we can swallow. I do like Mrs. Burton," rattled on the girl; "she is the dearest, nicest, best old woman in the world; don't tell mamma, though," she cried, turning to Lady Slade with sudden fright, "I believe mamma would faint if she thought I ever spoke to the Burtons more than with common civility."

Lady Slade, highly amused, promised she would never tell.

"We go heaps and heaps of times, Jack and I," went on Rosamond, encouraged in her confidences, "and we have tea and cakes, and strawberries and cream, and when they are over, apples and grapes, and Mr. Burton lets us ride his pony in the fields, and sometimes he gives me a pheasant or a partridge to take home as a surprise to mamma. Oh, he is so good and so kind to his mother, you don't know," said Rosamond, forgetting her own shortcomings on that point.

"I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure, my dear," said Lady Slade, gently, feeling as much as if she had been told her footman was kind to his wife.

"He keeps his mother entirely, and will never marry, though many girls would be delighted to get him, old as he is," cried Rosamond; "and oh, Lady Slade, see, they live in that cottage down by the wood," pointing to where the smoke of an ivy-covered farmstead curled on the frosty air. "I do wish you would come in the summer and have strawberries and cream."

Beatrice smiled at the girl's enthusiasm.

"We will have the strawberries and cream sent for to the Court, Rosamond," she said; "it would hardly do to take tea at one's steward's. Would it? You shall come to the Court and have them there."

Rosamond's excited countenance fell.

"It wouldn't——be quite the same," she faltered.

"No, much nicer," replied Beatrice. "I shall get quite jealous of the steward and his mother if you praise them like this, Rosamond."

"Oh, Lady Slade," exclaimed Rosamond, kissing her hands, "you are not in earnest, as if I could like common people as I like you. It was not them, it was the strawberries," she added, laughing roguishly.

"All the worse, Rosie, to sell me for a mess of pottage," cried Beatrice, in mock reproach as she stooped and kissed the girl's upturned face.

At the moment of this little episode, a turn in the road brought them in full view of the carriage and its occupants, Mr.

and Mrs. Stanley Harrington, Mrs. Harrington as usual driving her indolent husband.

As they passed the Slades' barouche, Mrs. Harrington smiled and kissed the tips of her fingers to Lady Slade, but neither Beatrice nor Rosamond could forbear seeing the look of undisguised astonishment with which Mrs. Harrington regarded Rosamond, nor the expressive shrug of her shoulders as she whipped her ponies to make them go quicker. She had evidently witnessed the little passage of affection between Rosamond and her friend.

"I *hate* that woman," exclaimed Rosamond Etheridge, after Mrs. Harrington had passed.

"Rosamond, my dear!"

Lady Slade could not help feeling shocked by Rosamond's emphatic expressions.

"I do, she's a *beast*!" cried heedless Rosamond.

"Rosamond! Rosamond! You really must not make use of such dreadful language," said the gentle Lady Slade, turning



her hazel eyes on the girl, full of horrified alarm.

"Oh, Lady Slade, I know she's horrid," cried the girl persistently.

"I am not aware of your reasons for saying so, but I think she is very nice, and she is my friend," said Lady Slade, gravely.

"*Your* friend, Lady Slade? Oh, I hope not," continued Rosamond. "Pray forgive me for speaking so plainly. I've been accustomed to Jack, you see. I didn't mean to offend you. I wouldn't offend you for the world, but I do hate her."

"But why, child?" asked Lady Slade; "you have surely some reason for making such assertions. What has she done to you?"

"Oh, nothing to me, and I have no reasons," replied the illogical girl; "but I don't like her."

"That is no justification for the strong language you used," replied Beatrice. "I think Mrs. Harrington an extremely nice and ladylike woman, and I shall be quite

pained, Rosamond, if I hear you speak of her in that manner again."

"I won't, Lady Slade,—dearest Lady Slade!" cried the penitent girl. "Pray forgive me this once, and I will never do it again!"

She looked so imploringly up into Beatrice's face that Lady Slade laughed.

"I have nothing to forgive, child. You have a right to your own opinions; but I want you to be a good little girl, and speak in the language of good society. Who is this dreadful Jack, who teaches you such expressions?"

"Jack is my brother," replied Rosamond, blushing; "the dearest boy in the world; but he is a middy, you know, and they learn all kinds of things at sea."

"Well, we cannot have Mr. Jack retailing them to young ladies at home, or what will people say of my *protégée*?"

The *protégée* laughed and smiled again, and pressed the hand of her kind admonitress to her lips.

She would try and be civil to Mrs.

Harrington for the future, she determined. She would have been civil to a demon, if she thought it would please Lady Slade.

The dinner at Chesham Court was a formal stately affair, though there was only Sir Reginald in addition to the luncheon party.

Rosamond would gladly have been excused, pleading that her mother would expect her home at dark ; but Lady Slade would not hear of it, and promised to send the groom down to Fern Cottage with a message to relieve Mrs. Etheridge's anxiety. Then Rosamond pleaded she had no dress ; but this Lady Slade overruled.

"There is only our own family," she said ; "and how could you dress when you have nothing here ? I will send my maid to you, my dear ; you won't know yourself by-and-by."

This was the truth, for Matilde just opened the front of Rosamond's dress, and with the aid of some soft white tulle and a

brown velvet sash, transformed it into quite a passable dinner toilette. Then she brushed the girl's shaggy hair into soft bright waves, and fastened a white rose on one side and another at her waist, and "*Voilà, Mademoiselle, vous êtes bien jolie !*" exclaimed the French maid, as she held the mirror before the blushing girl.

Rosamond stole quietly down into the drawing-room, where Sir Reginald and Lady Slade were already waiting.

Lady Slade took the girl's hand and introduced her to her husband. Sir Reginald at once entered into an easy conversation with Rosamond, whom he regarded in the light of an overgrown child ; and the three were laughing gaily over the events of the week, when Catherine Hyde, in all the glory of Chambery gauze, floated into the room.

She appeared to the bewildered eyes of the unsophisticated Rosamond, far more richly dressed than she really was. Catherine's dress was perfect, as all about her ; but it was the perfection of simplicity.

She was quickly followed by Lord Arthur Trelawney, and, dinner being announced, Sir Reginald, at a sign from his wife, gave his arm to the little girl in brown, who commenced trembling again as they passed through the double row of powdered footmen. Lord Arthur took in the lovely Catherine ; Lady Slade laughingly insisting on bringing up the rear.

“ You ought to have asked some other man to dinner, Beatrice,” remarked Sir Reginald after grace was said.

“ I never thought of it ; in fact I did not know whom to ask,” replied Lady Slade, glancing at Rosamond as though she would have been puzzled to find a congenial companion for her young visitor.

“ Five spoils the table,” said the Baronet, with the slightest shade of displeasure on his countenance, and Rosamond heartily wished herself away.

She felt sure he meant her ; it was all *her* fault, she thought. This time, also, she had the mortification to find herself alone on one side of the table, with (as she

fancied) two pairs of curious eyes watching her movements. She tried to escape Lord Arthur by hiding behind a huge *épergne*; but, in so doing, found herself full in front of Catherine Hyde, who, she was certain, was looking at her with proud disdain.

She was never more mistaken in her life; for, after the first glance, Miss Hyde was supremely unconscious of her existence during the whole of the dinner,—never giving her so much as a passing thought.

Rosamond, with a girl's self-consciousness, felt herself to be the object of universal attention, and determined to escape from her difficulty by keeping her eyes fixed on her plate, and never raising them except when spoken to. This she was able to do easily, for Sir Reginald, after the first few moments, addressed the whole of his conversation to his sister-in-law and his wife; while Lord Arthur devoted himself exclusively to Catherine Hyde.

Rosamond was heartily glad when dinner was over ; her face, what with the fresh air of the drive and her increasing agitation, was crimson and burning. She did not mend the matter by imagining, though she did not see him, that Lord Arthur, while talking to Catherine, was in reality watching her. She felt she hated him,—she felt she hated them all, except Lady Slade. She would like to have told them so to their faces, if she dared.

The very footmen, in their gorgeous liveries, were a distraction to the girl. She was sure they were watching all her movements, noting all her *gaucheries*, as they moved about with steady solemn tread, their white silk stockings and shining buttons.

She dared not take half the viands offered, because she had no conception what they were, and was certain the men would laugh, and talk about it afterwards, in the servants' hall,—“ How Miss Hetheridge didn't know how to heat her dinner, like my Lord and Lady.”

The poor child rose from the table feeling

quite hungry. She had all the appetite of a growing girl rendered keener by the bracing air of the moors. The delicious fragrance of the French made dishes taunted and tantalized her as she resolutely turned them away.

Those horrid servants would persist in coming to her after Lady Slade; if they would but help the others first, she would then see how they ate the tempting morsels placed before them, and might venture to take a piece now and then; but, no: she dared not touch anything with which she was not acquainted, and dined off a small slice of lamb and a tiny bit of wild duck.

As for wine, she ventured on nothing but champagne; and that stood her in good stead, for it gave her the courage she lacked, and enabled her, when dessert came on, to chatter away to Lady Slade, quite regardless of any one being in the room but themselves.

When the ladies retired, Lady Slade dispensing with the farce of nodding to



Rosamond, the girl had one half hour more of perfect enjoyment, for Miss Hyde, throwing herself on the lounge, was quickly absorbed in the contemplation of a book, and the caressing of her pet toy terrier, and Lady Slade drew her settee close to the fire—motioning Rosamond to a stool at her feet.

Here the girl went off into dream-land again, listening to the murmur of Beatrice's gentle voice, holding her soft hand—watching the pictures in the fire.

She could have sat so all night, and never wearied, but the entrance of Sir Reginald aroused the women from their lethargy, and warned Rosamond it was time to be returning home.

She rose from her seat, and reluctantly wished her friends good-night. She was sorry after all she was going home—it had been such an exciting day—how small—how insignificant, how shabby would the rooms at Fern Cottage appear compared with the splendid ones of Lady Slade.

Rosamond began to think she could even endure Miss Hyde's haughty contempt, for the pleasure of being always in this beautiful house, with Lady Slade.

But go she must, Beatrice bidding her come in to say a last good-night, when her hat and jacket were on, and promising to call at the Cottage the first day she went into the town.

Rosamond flew across the wide vestibule, and up the stairs she thought she descended when she came down to dinner, and was just entering a room, which to all appearance was the same as that which had been appropriated to her use during the day—when the door suddenly opened and she was just caught in the arms of Lord Arthur Trelawney.

"By Jove! the Lily of the valley," he exclaimed, detaining her round the waist, with a strong firm grasp, "To what am I indebted for this honour, pretty damsel?"

"Oh, Lord Arthur," cried Rosamond, with an agonized glance, "Let me go, pray do."

“What! as coy as shy?” he cried, smiling insolently. “Do you think I am going to allow you to escape—till you tell me what you came for.”

“I came for my hat—for my things,” she exclaimed, struggling violently in the strong man’s arms. “Let me go, sir—I beg—I insist—how dare you—how *dare* you?” but she was powerless as an infant in his arms.

“Not till I’ve had a kiss, pretty one, if I die for it,” he exclaimed, his handsome face flushed with wine and excitement. “Rosamond, you are as lovely as a tigress, and almost as fierce.”

“Oh, let me go! Oh, let me go!” cried the terrified girl—“I’ll call Lady Slade, I’ll scream.”

“Scream away,” he replied, with the utmost *sang froid*, his bold passionate eyes rivetted on her face. “No one will hear you here, why did you come to the bachelor’s quarters, if you didn’t want to find me? tell me.”

Rosamond’s heart beat fast with agony;

she half comprehended the truth, she had mistaken the stairs—she had come to the wrong wing of the house. She strove to tear herself away, fighting him with all her feeble strength, striking him with her childish hands. “If you don’t let me go, I’ll kill you,” she cried.

“Delicious little demon—what a pleasant death it would be. I tell you, Rosamond, you are far more charming than all the cold proud beauties in the world—hit away, Baby, I can stand a great deal of thumping. I’ll stop here till you are tired, my pretty Rosamond.”

“Oh, sir, if you are a gentleman,” she cried, her voice hoarse with her continued struggles, “do let me go—you know I did not mean to come up these stairs—you know it is a mistake. Lady Slade may not believe me, but God knows it’s the truth,” exclaimed the agonised girl, bursting into tears.

Lord Arthur relaxed his hold, “There, Baby, don’t cry,” he said, soothingly. “I didn’t mean to wound you, it was all a piece

of fun—give me one little kiss, and I will let you go at once. Nay more, I'll show you the way to your own room."

But Rosamond shrank from his fierce licentious gaze.

"No, no," she cried; "I hate you—I hate you."

"Well, I suppose you must have it your own way," cried Lord Arthur, with a careless laugh; "women always do with me, though they say I'm such a *routé*. Here, child, take the first turning to the right, and cross that gallery, and you will find Lady Slade's room. I suppose yours is not far away. What! you ungrateful little monkey, not one word of thanks, not even a civil good night? Ah! *mechante*, you are like the rest of your fair sex, ungrateful to the core."

Rosamond scarcely heeded what he said, but, liberated from his grasp, flew across the corridor, and luckily reached her chamber without meeting anyone. Here she bathed her agitated face in a basin of cold water. She was trembling all over

from her recent fright, but managed to put on her hat, and fasten her jacket, and look as little discomposed as she could, when she found her way back to the drawing-room.

“Oh, that dreadful man!” She determined to tell Lady Slade, but could not do so when Sir Reginald and Miss Hyde were there—they might not believe her story—and perhaps Lord Arthur would come in and contradict all she said.

“How rude he was—how dare he speak to her as he did—the bad wicked man. Did all gentlemen behave like that in society? Ah, no, he would never dare to treat ladies so; he thought she was a child—a nobody, but she would let him see. Her mother! no, she must not tell her mother; she would never let her come to Chesham Court again, and, after all, she thought—he *might* have meant it all in fun as he said—gentlemen in society did such funny things, she read of them in books—and then he was kind at the very end of

all, and showed her where to find her room, and he called her pretty too—what could he mean by that, she was not pretty she knew quite well, but she wondered if he really thought so.”

All these imaginations flew through the busy brain of the little maiden, as she re-entered the drawing-room, where Lady Slade, wondering at her long absence, was just coming to look for her. Rosamond stammered out some excuse about not finding her room, and Sir Reginald gave her his arm to lead her to the carriage, which was waiting ; Beatrice, after the manner of women, smothering her with kisses and adieux.

Miss Hyde had disappeared, and Lord Arthur, to Rosamond's great relief, was nowhere to be seen ; but, just as the footman was shutting up the steps, his dark handsome face appeared at the opposite side of the carriage window.

“Say good night, and that you forgive me, Rosamond,” he whispered, in his low sweet voice, holding out his hand.

"Good night, Lord Arthur," replied trembling Rosamond, not daring to meet his eyes.

"I'm going away to-morrow, and I am not likely to offend again," he said; and then the man shut the door, and the carriage was whirled away.

"I'll do it again though, if ever I get the chance," he muttered to himself, as he stood on the steps of the house, finishing his cigar. "What a cursed fool I was to let her go, the lovely little witch."



## CHAPTER IX.

ROBERT BURTON.

I'M obliged to come down. I must descend from my pedestal. I've been riding the high horse ever since I commenced this book, and now, behold, I am forced to dismount from my Pegasus, and travel about a little on Shanks's pony.

"It's a dreadful bore," as Stanley Harrington would say.

You and I, my friends, have been fluttering about like butterflies in the summer garden of fashionable life, living with lords and ladies, going to grand marriages, and balls, and entertainments, riding in carriages, and having our meals served to us on golden plates, by powdered flunkies ;

and now we have to come "Out of Society" into the ordinary hum-drum world.

What a shame it is ! You and I were so happy while in the midst of all these fine people—so much at home ; their tastes, their feelings, their ideas, were all so thoroughly *d'accord* with ours. We shall have to lift up our skirts, and hold our noses, while we pass through the mire of this lower existence, into the land of the "Great Unwashed."

It is so nice to be in "good society," to hob-nob with dukes and earls, to have the Marchioness of D—— insisting on your coming to her little reception, or the Lord of F—— inviting you on board his yacht. There is such a tone of high breeding, of sincerity, about it all ; such an air of refinement and bon-hommie ; what a pity it is we cannot live in it always, without coming in contact with the *canaille* at all.

I wonder if there will be a better status of things when the millennium arrives ? At present one comes, cheek by jowl, with these

dreadfully disagreeable people at every step we take.

If we pay our penny for our chair in the park, any low person who possesses one of Her Majesty's effigies can take the next chair, and overpower us with the perfume of tobacco or onions. If we go to Hurlingham, some horrid creature, "God alone knows how," has crept in there. If we go to the opera, we may be close to them in the stalls, or hustled by them on the stairs.

They have followed us even abroad. If we go up the Rhine, or over the Pyrenees, ten chances to one but we find our tailor or our hatter lodged in a better suite of apartments than our own, at the first hotel in the place. Our sacred eyes are insulted by a familiar bow and smile from our tailor as we stand on the steps of St. Peter's at Rome. And our daughters' refined ears are shocked at the *table d'hôte* by hearing Mrs. Hatter describe "How she walked over the Halps with a Halpine stock, while Brown, he would ride in the conveyance."

They, the lower million, seem, like horse-

radish, to take root and multiply everywhere.

The only place I know where we are quite safe from their intrusion, is in our own sanctum-sanctorum. There, in the softest of velvet arm-chairs, with the last fashionable novel in our hands, we can revel at our ease in the society of marquises and viscounts, and live that life which is necessary to our happy existence, and for which alone we were born.

What a mistake it all is ! I don't wish to be irreverent, but if *we* had had a finger in the creation, what a very different world it would have been !

There would have been no poor—at all events they would have had an island to themselves, somewhere a long way off, where we could neither have been contaminated by their touch, nor offended by their misery.

Never mind, as we didn't make the world, we shall have to put up with it, such as it is, hoping for a better state of things in the next.

Put on your roughest dress, your thickest boots, and come and tramp with me for a little while in the fields that are "Out of Society."

Sir Reginald Slade's steward stood, hat in hand, gazing at the carriage long after it had passed.

What induced him to do so, on a cold, frosty afternoon, was a mystery that has to be explained.

It could not be that he had never seen a carriage before, because a great many carriages often came into Rubestown, and he was perfectly well acquainted with this particular one, having himself given directions for its being newly painted, just before Sir Reginald's marriage.

Then as to Lady Slade, though her ladyship's hazel eyes had never, to her knowledge, rested on him before, he had seen her often enough—both on the day of her coming home and when she had been driving through the town; besides, was not he, with a number of others, in the house—

keeper's room at Bingley Towers, the night of the ball? And didn't he, from behind a pillar, watch Lady Slade as, clad in bridal white, she ascended the staircase on the arm of Plantagenet Jones?

It could not be her ladyship he was surprised to see, and as for Rosamond, little Rosamond Etheridge, he had known her ever since she was a child, and being aware that she visited the people at the Towers he was not at all astonished at seeing her out driving with Lady Slade. No, it was something deeper than all this, that stirred the inmost feelings of the steward's heart, and caused him to brush his hand across his eyes, before he resumed his inspection of the land he had been studying so attentively.

It was the remembrance of a grave, lying far away in the busy manufacturing city where the black smoke hung heavily on the air, and the ceaseless tramp of feet, the constant babel of voices, were all about the church-yard where the silent sleeper lay. It was the recollection of a white

face, and soft brown eyes, of a slight attenuated form that grew thinner and whiter each day, till it faded altogether : of a sweet voice and a tender smile, that would never murmur or smile for him again as long as life should be life on earth.

She was only a girl of the people, a poor weaver's daughter, who worked in his father's mill, but she had proud sweet ways, and a gentle loving heart, and she was fairer and better in his eyes than all the women in the world. They were engaged, for, poor as she was, Robert Burton's parents preferred the purity and modesty of the weaver's child to any other dower a richer girl might have brought their son. A few brief months of untold happiness, and then, on the eve of their wedding-day, Lucy Gaythorpe lay cold and still, claimed by another bridegroom—Death.

The long long years of hard toil had done their work. The poverty, the hunger, the suffering, each set their mark. The seeds of consumption sown in early youth

were brought to fruition by constant exposure to cold and damp, and the patient worker merely folded her hands and fell asleep, with a prayer on her lips for her lover's welfare. The man, whose life she had left desolate, turned away from her grave in the heart of the busy city, and worked harder than he had ever done before; but the smiles of no other maiden consoled him for the loss of his dead Lucy; he was faithful to the memory of his buried sweetheart, his one only love.

When years passed on, and the mill, once so prosperous, was ruined by constant strikes, and the trades' union broke the heart of honest Richard Burton, who had risen boy and man till he took possession of his former master's mill, Robert, his son, sick of the life that had killed his Lucy, and dragged his father to a premature grave, having a little learning and a good knowledge of figures, and a few pounds accumulated by careful saving, sought for and obtained, through the interest of a wealthy merchant, the position



of under-bailiff to Sir Geoffrey Slade, Sir Reginald's respected father. This situation he held for many years, to the mutual satisfaction of his employer and himself; and at the death of the steward was promoted to his present place.

Robert Burton brought his mother, whom he had supported since his father's death, to the cottage or farmstead, at the entrance of Chesham Woods. The old lady kept house for him during all this time, her son never as much as dreaming of bringing a rival to her home. Not that his mother would have objected, for she was getting infirm and old, and often mourned over her son's obstinate determination to put no one in the place of his lost Lucy, or that the girls of Rubestown and adjacent villages did not try all they knew to attract the attention of the good-looking steward, who was reported to have a "pot of money" saved up somewhere, besides a snug little farm and homestead into the bargain. But though he laughed with them, chatted with them, nay, even flirted with some of

the prettiest, Robert Burton was at forty an unmarried man and a confirmed old bachelor.

He was a grave studious man, fond of books and thoughtful reading, eschewing the amusements generally sought after by those of his own walk in life. When he was younger, he had joined a great deal in athletic sports, and was especially fond of the good old English game of bowls; but as years crept on, confined himself wholly to looking after the management of Sir Reginald's estates, and devoted his evenings to his books and his mother. He was fond of riding, of which exercise he naturally took his share, having a great expanse of ground to travel daily in the way of business and seeing after his men.

He sometimes dropped in at Bingley Towers to have a chat with the steward, (who was very well informed, having travelled a good deal abroad), and into the coffee-room at the "Black Eagle," where he was always welcome, and where he was sure to find some congenial spirits with

whom he could smoke a pipe and discuss the affairs of the place.

Rubestown was wise in its generation and noted the progress of its rising men with especial interest and attention. The elders of that very important town would nod their heads at each other significantly as the grave form of the steward on his little black mare would pass them when standing at their shop doors or in the market-place.

The march of intellect had not progressed so far into Moorshire, that the honest burghers of Rubestown were all good classical scholars. School-boards had not been invented then, and some of the good folk, though they could sell a stack of corn, or cheapen a load of hay, could scarcely write their own names, much less read the price of their own cheeses. Robert Burton was a sort of oracle amongst them, when, paper in hand, he stood at the corner of the 'Change in the morning, and quoted the latest prices in the London market.

"Thou nows, ma lad," (it was always "ma lad" in those parts, be the person addressed ever so old). "Mee feyther was oo'er poor to give uz the eddication he'd liked, an hae's been tu throng all ma life to tak' up wi' it me-sen, so read uz a bit, that's a good lad, and tell uz what the're aboot in Lunnun toon, and 'Robert ma bairn,' what's t'price of courn to-day, and be there ony tidings of t'strikes at pits, and what does t'members it Hoose say about t'war with Roosha?"

Such were the greetings with which he was generally assailed whenever he went into Rubestown; he took them all in good part, giving the poor folks the information they asked for and gladdening the heart of many an old dame by reading her the particulars of the last horrible murder or latest sensational elopement.

It was something, then, in the chiselled profile, or soft brown eyes of Lady Slade, that struck to the heart of the steward as her carriage rolled away, and reminded him,

(as a bar of music heard in distant lands brings sudden tears of recollection to the eyes of the listener), of the dead face lying cold and still in the far off manufacturing city, where the children played amongst the grass-grown graves, and the ceaseless whirr of the mills disturbed the smoky air. It was this that caused him to brush his hand across his eyes, and for a moment the landscape stretching out before him to become blurred and dim, and the church steeples, quiet villages, and ancient gables, all resolve into a misty heterogeneous mass. For a moment a choking sensation filled his throat, and then the sweet spring sunshine was glinting on the copses and the meadows again, and the dark earnest eyes of Robert Burton were fixed on the azure sky overspread with fleecy clouds.

"My Lucy!" he murmured, and a lark rose out of the young green wheat, and went trilling, trilling, on, higher and higher still, singing its wondrous song of gratitude to God.

I don't think Robert Burton was a reli-

gious man ; in fact, I am sure he was not, at least, not religious in the sense Miss Sarah Archer and the young ladies at " All Saints " would have interpreted it. When he went to church at all, (and, it is to be regretted, that was very seldom), he generally frequented the old ivy-covered building that stood on the edge of the Chesham Court estate, and was patronised by Mrs. Stanley Harrington. This was attended principally by the farmers and their families, — all good old-fashioned Church of England folks, who thought there could be no finer music than the Old Hundredth Psalm ; nothing grander than the Vicar's droning sermons.

It was the church they had been accustomed to go to for generations back ; their fathers, mothers, and children, were all buried in the churchyard, through which they passed twice a day each Sunday ; and their opinions and principles were as fixed as their high-backed pews, and quite as ancient. " They didn't want any new-fangled innovations, they didn't ! the grand

high church in the town might do very well for the gentry and grand folks ; but it smacked rather over much of popery for them, and they had read all about that in Foxe's Book of Martyrs,—which, with the Family Bible and Pilgrim's Progress, set off with various goblets of antiquated glass, generally ornamented every side-board in a well-appointed farmhouse.

Robert Burton—to the scandal of his more pious neighbours—usually preferred roaming about the meadows, especially in summer on a Sunday morning, or lying at ease, with a pipe and a book, under the shade of an oak or elm, by the side of a woodland tarn.

If he were questioned—as he often was by those who knew as well as he where he had been—under whose minister's exhortations he had sat, he would gravely reply, with a twinkle in his eyes, that he had been to Dr. Greenfields', and had listened to the finest sermon he had ever heard preached in his life.

If they pressed him further, as to the

text or matter, he would tell them how the daisies, and the foxgloves, and the sweet wild convolvuli, told of the goodness and wisdom of the great Creator; how the birds and the streamlets sang hymns together; the oxen, with their large brown eyes, lowed out the chorus, and the little lambkins danced in very thankfulness of life.

He would tell them how the mountains and the hills, and the ceaseless running river, praised God through all creation, as they had done in the beginning; how the lilies of the field in their spotless loveliness and purity, witnessed still against man's vanity and ambition, as they did in those old, old days, when the mournful gaze of the Son of Man rested with satisfaction on their wondrous beauty.

His hearers would often laugh and shake their heads,—

“Nay; nay, ma lad! doon't think to cheat uz so; thou's fun that oo't o' books thou reads, or oot o' thee own 'ead.”

Robert Burton would smile, and tell them to go and hear Dr. Greenfields for them-



selves, if they disbelieved what he said : and bade them come in, and have a glass of home-brewed ale and a pipe, and not bother themselves about his opinions or his views.

“ He believed what his father had done,” he said ; “ and his mother prayed enough for both of them.”

After a little more examination of the meadows and crops that lay before him in the mellow light of the afternoon sun, Robert Burton turned aside, and crossing the road, opened a little gate, and walked leisurely up the white stone footway that led to his cottage door.

There was a neat trim garden on either side the path, which at this season of the year was full of crocuses, primroses, and early tulips. Behind the house stretched another and a longer garden, where the strawberries grew ; and beyond that, the farm with its meadows, its orchards, and its stacks of hay and corn.

There was an unusual air of listlessness and weariness about him as he hung up his

hat and his coat on a peg in the passage, changed his boots, and entered the long narrow room, that went by the name of the living room, that attracted the attention of his mother, causing her to lay down her knitting and peer anxiously at her son from over the top of her spectacles.

"Isn't thee well, Robert?" she said, after a pause; as, instead of talking, as was his wont, he merely smiled and took up the newspaper.

"Quite well, mother. Why?"

"Thee doesn't seem well."

"Don't I,—I feel so,—appearances are sometimes deceitful, mother mine."

Mrs. Burton looked at her knitting, then at the fire, on which a bright copper kettle was singing gaily; then at the table, with its blue-and-white tea service.

"A cup of tea will do thee a power of good, Robert," said the housewife; "the kettle is just on the boil, and Annie is baking the cakes."

"I shall be glad of tea, but I'm quite well

nevertheless," returned her son, with a smile, still perusing his paper.

"Thou's been oversetting thee sel, as usual," went on Mrs. Burton, never heeding his remark; "mebbe, a slice of ham and eggs would set thee up; the brown hen has laid some beauties this week."

"I can eat ham and eggs anytime in the day," laughed Mr. Burton; "but I assure you, mother, I don't need them after the hearty dinner I made. As for oversetting myself, I've only been round the lower field and through Bromley Wood this afternoon."

The good wife made no reply, but laying down her knitting, busied herself about the tea table, cutting bread-and-butter, and placing it, with some fresh cresses from the brook hard by, close beside her son.

Mrs. Burton was a comely little body, with a soft round face, shrined in a framework of silver hair; her cheeks were like two dried rosy apples; her eyes were dark and piercing, like those of her son. It was difficult to guess her exact age: she might

have been sixty ; she might have been more ; but did not look older than fifty-five. She had a quick sharp way with her as she bustled about the room that might have belonged to a still younger woman. Her dress was of plain black material. Over her matronly bust she wore a snow-white muslin handkerchief, after the manner of the "Society of Friends." During the week she wore a black cap with a full border, but on Sundays it was changed to white, with pale lavender ribbons—the only colour Mrs. Burton was ever known to favour.

The room was as neat and cleanly as its mistress ; the chairs, and the table, and the wainscoting shone till the grain of the wood could be clearly distinguished. The few pictures hung round the walls were of a sacred character, not remarkable either for execution or design. These were relieved by guns, fishing-rods, stags' heads, and foxes' brushes, arranged in artistic fashion between the divers plates.

The world and the church contended

even in the steward's humble cottage, and the devil claimed his share in the form of a silver drinking goblet, won in a rowing match, and two enormous meerschaum pipes, one representing "Bacchus," the other "Undine."

The stove was as bright as only country fire-places ever are, and the kettle hanging from the polished steel bar across the chimney hissed out its delight after the manner of kettles, when at full steam.

After the tea was poured out, and the steward had nearly demolished his ham and eggs, Mrs. Burton looked across at her son and said,

"Wasn't that a carriage that went down the lane, a bit before thee came in? I thought I knew the sound of t'wheels."

"Aye, mother, it was Sir Reginald's carriage, and his wife was in it, and Rosamond Etheridge."

"And how is me leddy looking now? poor bairn," asked Mrs. Burton, helping herself to cream. She had been at the gathering of the tenants when the Slades

came into Rubestown, and Beatrice, tired and pale faced, had excited her motherly compassion.

"Better, a deal better, mother," replied the steward, a slight flush on his dark face, "she's getting used to the gaieties now."

"Aye, there's no fear but she'll soon get used to them—sic fooleries is the marrow of grand folks' lives—she'll hold her own with the rest of 'em, na doot."

"Well, and why shouldn't she? If a young bride with plenty of money at her back shouldn't enjoy life, who should?" He spoke as if he felt slightly annoyed, taking up the cudgels for his young mistress there and then.

"Nay, nay, I said nought aboot enjoyment—did I? thou tak's me up too sharp, ma lad; what I spoke of was the follies and nonsense which the gentry calls pleasure."

"Well, I suppose it is pleasure to them."

"Oh, aye," cried the old woman—crooning over her tea, "so is the tankard to the drunkard—the dice box to the gambler;

but they all end in the same way, sin and death—sin and death.”

“Don’t preach us a sermon, mother,” cried the steward, pushing his chair away from the table and reaching his pipe down from the mantle shelf, “I’ve not been overblessed with merry thoughts to-day. I wonder if Sir Reginald will make that poor young thing a good husband,” he continued—more as if he were perusing the current of his own ideas than addressing his mother.

“Good Lord, save us, and why not?”

“I don’t know; but though he is my master, and I have no reason to find fault with him myself, I should think he was anything but fitted to make a woman happy.”

“Weell, she’s made her bed, and maun lig in it, as the saying is—but I’d be sorry if ony grief were to come to her bonny face,” replied the widow commiseratingly.

“I hope he will treat her well.”

“Treat her well—he’ll be sure to do that, he’ll never fling it in her face that she had na fortune.”

By which speech it may be discovered the state of Lady Slade's finances was pretty well known to her dependents.

"A man may do worse things than that, mother. I don't like the way Sir Reginald is going on at all—he sent me word to day, to cut down Bromley wood."

"To cut down Bromley wood?" almost shrieked the old woman, "thou is joking, sure lie."

"I wish I were," replied the steward sadly, I don't like to see the old sticks going like this! what Sir Reginald wants with the money, I don't know, his income is large enough and to spare for all his needs."

"Mebbe he's been at great expense wi' his wife," suggested Mrs. Burton; "men, when they get new-fangled wi' a girl"—

"I don't think Sir Reginald is the man to be 'new-fangled,' as you call it, with anyone; he has most likely bought his wife as he would buy a horse, or anything else he took a fancy to."

"Well, she looks a bonny lass, and it's to



be whoped she'll mak a good mistress to the tenantry—there's plenty o' poor for her to try her hand upon. She had Rosamond Etheridge with her, did t'say? I'm reet glad on it—that poor lass has need of somebody to be kind to her, poor bairn."

"Mother, you forget Mrs. Etheridge; I'm sure she's kind enough to Rosamond."

"Eh—you're just like the rest of the men; thinking kindness is stuffing a girl's mouth with sweets, and letting her hev her ain way. I tell thee, lad, Rosamond Etheridge stands in need of mair kindness than her poor silly mither can giv—the kindness of good sound advice, and a word of reproof when she's ganging wrong."

"Why, mother, I thought Rosamond was a favourite of yours," cried Mr. Burton in astonishment.

"So she is, poor bairn—but can't I see the faults of them I luv?"

"You never see any in me."

Mrs. Burton shook her head in smiling reproof.

"Ah, Robert, 'thou only hast one."

“And that, mother?”

“Thou won’t wed thee with a wife—what is the use of this fine house, and all the farm, if there’s nabody to ha’ it when I am gone? When wilt t’gladden my old eyes with the sight of a daughter’s face—the patter of baby feet aboat the barn?”

Mrs. Burton looked anxiously and lovingly at her son.

“Why, mother,” he cried, laying down his pipe, and laughing, “are you getting tired of me, that you want a parcel of women and children about the place? the old home wouldn’t look half so nice and clean, if there were a lot of bairns to smear the walls with their greasy fingers—you are quite enough wife for me, mother dear.”

“Nay, I’m not,” replied the old woman, shaking her head, “thee cannot put me off wi words like these. ‘It is not good for man to live alone.’ I cannot reckon on many mair years to live—God has been very good to spare me sa lang; but the summons will come full soon, and I maun

be ready—I maun be ready,” she muttered in a hushed voice. “Robert, I’d like to bless the girl thou chooses for thee wife, and kiss my grand children before I die.”

Mr. Burton paced up and down the room—“Mother,” he said, after a pause—“don’t you know this is a settled subject between us; why press me on a matter for which I have no inclination? besides,” he added, with a forced laugh, “who would have me? who would look at me, now I am old, and my hair is turning grey?”

“Plenty, plenty,” cried his mother, eagerly, “there’s Millicent Smith, the brewer’s daughter.”

“An idle thriftless jade.”

“And Winnie Saltmarsh, at the Hollow Farm.”

“She thinks more of flaunting her ribbons, than milking her cows; I’ll have nothing to say to either of them. Why, mother,” he cried, stopping suddenly in his walk, and crossing the room to where she stood, “you’re going demented. What better wife could man want, than you,

the kindest, dearest old woman in the world?"

The pleased mother tapped his cheek.

"Thou art as saucy, lad, as ever thou wert; but I live in hopes."

"Not of a wife," responded her son, kissing her cheek. "Why should you seek to make me dissatisfied with the blessings I have—a good mother, a good income, and a good house? What more could I possibly desire?"

"What God has given me."

"Why, what is that?" cried he, in astonishment.

"A good son, — His holy name be praised," said Mrs. Burton, raising her eyes reverently to Heaven, and laying her hands on Robert's head.

## CHAPTER X.

### “THE PICTURE BY MURILLO.”

WHEN Lady Slade and her sister drove over to the Towers, about a week after Rosamond's visit to the Court, they found the household there in a terrible state of distress.

The Rector of All Saints had been seized with an attack of paralysis, and consequently there had been no morning service at that fashionable church, nor did there seem likely to be any for many mornings to come.

Maria and Jane were in despair. Their matins were as much a necessity of existence to them as their breakfast ; and, to do the girls justice, they really and sincerely felt that day badly spent, when they went

without their customary prayers. No matter how early, no matter how unfavourable the weather, the little brougham from Bingley was always to be seen outside the church door, and the two girls inside, praying with all the energy of their pious little hearts. They were generally accompanied by their cousin, Miss Archer, who performed her devotions in the exemplary manner already recorded, and who frequently did not return to the Towers till she had gone her customary round of charity and inspection. Maria and Jane would be steeped to the lips in worldly frivolities before their amiable cousin came back from catechising the little Rubestownites, or setting the households of their parents by the ears.

The girls would pay flying visits to their schools or societies on certain appointed days; but they usually ended in stuffing the children with cakes and sweets, or promising the old women an extra allowance of tea; and so undoing all the good Miss

Archer had done before. The children were always delighted when the ladies from Bingley came to the schools: they knew it invariably meant a half-holiday, or, at least, an exemption from punishment. But the church occupied, as I said before, all the spare time of the Joneses' establishment, and the girls grudged neither work nor money to render the house of God fit for His holy presence.

Here now was a *contretemps*. The venerable old Rector was seriously ill, and neither church nor schools could go on properly without him.

Miss Archer, who had already spent nearly all the morning at the Rectory, was deeply engrossed in the study of a doctor's book on medicine and diseases, out of which she hoped to get something that would do her Rector good. All in vain. The description of so many diseases tallied exactly with the Rector's symptoms, that it was difficult to discover whether it was paralysis or apoplexy, coma, or gout, that

had so suddenly deprived her of his spiritual ministrations.

She read till her eyes ached, every new chapter producing fresh thought, till she would not have been surprised to hear that it was not paralysis at all, but a sudden attack of measles or Bright's disease that had laid him low.

Maria and Jane were unaffectedly concerned. Poor Maria's merry round face was as long as a fiddle, while the quieter Jane sought in prayer the remedies she failed to find elsewhere.

"He will be such a dreadful loss," said Jane Jones, her blue eyes full of genuine tears.

"I'm sure there's no one in Rubestown fit to supply his place," cried Maria, with more truth than politeness.

"The saints are always taken first," piously remarked Miss Sarah Archer, turning up the whites of her eyes ; an observation that, considering the good old Rector's sixty-seven years, was certainly open to discussion.



"Someone must be sent for," said Catherine Hyde, decisively ; "the church can never be closed on Sundays."

"Ah ! no, my dear," replied Miss Archer ; "the services must be conducted, even if that sweet saint is breathing his last. It behoves us all to unite in fervent prayer that our beloved pastor may be spared to us for many years to come."

"I am sure I will pray," cried Catherine, earnestly ; "poor old gentleman ; it was only the other evening he seemed so well and happy. Do you not remember him, Beatrice, speaking to us at the ball ?"

"'In the midst of life we are in death !'" piously ejaculated Miss Sarah Archer. "What a warning, my young friends, for us all."

"Oh, Miss Archer, let us hope Dr. Bingham will not die. I have heard of people passing years between the first and second strokes," cried Beatrice, hopefully

Miss Sarah shook her head ; she always, if possible, looked on the darkest side.

"He will never be the same, Lady Slade. I am afraid he is too old to rally ; his health has been failing for some time past. My great anxiety now is who is to succeed him, who will finish the good work begun, and conduct his ministrations in the self-same spirit ? There is no knowing what 'views' the new curate may not hold."

"I don't see it much matters, so long as they are good views," remarked Beatrice. "I believe Dr. Bingham has not done very much for years."

Miss Archer, horrified, held up her hands.

"Oh ! Lady Slade, whoever has instilled such dreadful ideas into your head ? Dr. Bingham is a perfect saint."

"Is not perfection a state of repose ?" questioned Lady Slade, laughingly.

"Not such perfection as our dear rector's," returned Miss Sarah, sharply. "He may have been content to rest out-

wardly, knowing on whom he could depend for work, but his beneficent heart was ever in motion, ever praying and acting."

"The question is, who are we to get to replace him?" interrupted Maria, who looked at the practical side of it. "There is a litany and procession on Sunday evening. Who will take the services?"

"Mr. Thorpe," suggested Jane.

"Mr. Thorpe! a confirmed Evangelical! I wonder at you, Jane, proposing such a man."

"Mr. Thorpe is a very nice young man," cried Jane Jones, tossing her head.

"Very nice in following the hounds and playing croquet, but his voice. Oh, Jane, did you ever hear him sing?"

"I have heard him attempt," replied Jane, laughing.

The momentous question was decided by the entrance of Mr. Plantagenet Jones, who had driven up from the bank in a dog-cart, and burst into the room radiant and smiling, his stout proportions encased

in a long coat, now commonly known as an "Ulster," elaborately trimmed with seal-skin.

"Delighted to see you, Lady Slade. Miss Hyde, you are looking quite charming this morning," he exclaimed, rushing impulsively at his daughter's visitors. "Cold? it's very cold. There's a sharp sting in the air to-day. Wind's easterly, I think. You have heard the news, of course, Lady Beatrice. Sad loss—terrible loss; awfully sorry, poor Bingham has cut up so."

"Is there no hope, papa?" cried Jane.

"None at all, my dear; merely a question of time; the next attack may come at any moment."

"Oh, poor Mr. Bingham. What shall we do?" cried all three women in chorus.

Beatrice and Catherine looked their regrets.

"Do! why do without him," exclaimed Plantagenet Jones, as he proceeded to rub his little red hands, glittering with diamonds, over the blazing fire.

"There's as 'good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' eh, Miss Hyde?"

Catherine blushed at the man's coarse vulgarity, but made no reply.

"I suppose you women are all mourning over your 'functions,'—or what d'ye call them? You fancy you won't be able to do so much bowing and scraping,—eh, young ladies? but you will. What will you give me for my news?"

"Oh, do tell us, papa," cried both his daughters, hanging on him.

"I've a great mind not, only you will find it out for yourselves. My friend, the Duke of A——, was in the bank this morning, he had heard the news, (queer thing how news does travel) and came rushing down at once to solicit my interest for a *protégé* of his own, some young fellow related to the family, I believe."

"And you gave it, papa?" inquired Maria, full of curiosity.

"Wait a bit, my dear," waving her off.  
"His grace wished me to write to the bishop about his friend, and he was pleased

to add," continued the banker, puffing with conscious pride, "that he was sure my word would be law with the bishop."

"I'm sure it will," cried Beatrice.

"I have the vanity to believe it will, Lady Slade. When a man has done as much for a church as I have, he ought to have a voice in the appointment of her ministers. Don't you think so, Lady Slade?"

Beatrice replied she perfectly agreed with him.

"And I've done my share towards 'All Saints,' I can tell you!" he added. "A pretty penny that little edifice has cost P. J. Well, well, my girls tell me I shall have my reward in the next world, but I would like a little of it in this, just to make sure," and the banker winked, actually winked, at Catherine Hyde.

"Who is the clergyman, papa? What is his name?" cried his loving daughters, crowding round him.

"God bless my soul, I've forgotten all about his name," he exclaimed, fumbling in

his long pockets, "I've left his card on my desk. When a man has his head full of business, Lady Slade, it is so difficult to remember these little trifles. Let me see. Adair—Adair something, I believe. Never mind the man's name, you'll know that soon enough. He's an out and outer at your little game, nearly got suspended at one place for his goings on, but the family's good, and the Duke assures me he is really a very estimable young man."

"A young man?" questioned Miss Sarah Archer, doubtfully.

"Well, turned thirty, I believe, but quite young enough for you girls to lose your silly hearts about him."

"Oh, papa!"

"I'm joking, of course, my dears. A curate of even good family is no match for *my* daughters," cried the banker pompously; "but he will do to work slippers for, and dress up in petticoats, much better than poor old Bingham, who is half superannuated."

"Papa!" exclaimed Maria and Jane, indignantly.

"Plantagenet!" cried the shocked Miss Sarah.

Beatrice laughed, and Catherine frowned.

"Oh, you women, you women, you will not see my little jokes. Miss Hyde, you spoil that lovely face of yours by frowning. I intended no disrespect either to the church or to my dear old friend. I shall lose many a pleasant chat, many a good game of chess unless he rallies, which he cannot do except by a miracle; but, 'such is life,' my dears; 'tempus fugit,' as some one says; it is a warning to us to have our ledgers ready when the day of reckoning comes;" and the banker gazed pleasantly round on his Lares and Penates.

"It is, indeed," sighed Miss Archer pensively.

"Well, I'm glad we are to have some one," said Maria Jones in an accent of relief. "I don't care if he is young or old, so long as he can officiate properly."

"I'm glad, too," replied Lady Slade; "it would have been a great pity to close the church."



"Fancy 'All Saints' without a priest," cried Jane; "it would be like the middle ages when the kingdom was placed under an interdict."

"But those were Catholic times," said Catherine Hyde.

"Well, we are Catholics, Anglican Catholics."

"A distinction without a difference that Jenny."

"Nothing of the sort, papa. Roman Catholics are utterly different."

"Well, I know I'm not a holy Roman," cried the banker, laughing, "and what is more, I don't wish to be. How is my friend Sir Reginald, Lady Slade? I did not see him in Rubestown this morning."

Beatrice explained that her husband had gone over to the next town to look at a horse.

"What a devil of a fellow—beg pardon, Lady Beatrice—he is for a horse. It was only the other day he gave two hundred guineas for the one he is now riding. You must look after him, my lady, money soon flies when a man goes in for horseflesh!"

"Sir Reginald is the best judge of his own affairs, Mr. Jones," replied Beatrice, rather proudly. There was a slight flush on her cheeks as she spoke, she did not quite like Plantagenet's manner of speaking.

"Of course, of course," returned the banker, holding up his hand to admire his diamond rings. "I've no wish to interfere, Lady Slade, but you are young beginners, you know, and I've always looked upon you like one of my own daughters."

Beatrice relented in a moment. "I'm sure you meant it kindly," she said, smiling; "but if Sir Reginald chooses to waste his money on horses, I scarcely think he would like me to interfere; besides we have ample room for more, the stables at Chesham are not half full—Sir Reginald gives me all I want," she said, blushing, "why should I find fault with him, for indulging his pet amusement?"

"Very prettily spoken, Lady Slade," replied Plantagenet Jones; "if all husbands and wives held the same opinions, there

would be less domestic unhappiness in the world."

Beatrice coloured at the compliment.

Plantagenet Jones walked to the window, and stood gazing out for some moments in silence, possibly he was thinking of the life his own spouse was supposed to have led him; people used to say, (for all his pride and arrogance now), he then could not say his soul was his own; that might be as it may, there are always plenty of evil-disposed persons ready to swear to anything, provided it is against some one more up in the world than themselves. The banker looked anything but a hen-pecked man, judging by his round smiling face and comfortable appearance. He turned to where Catherine was standing, examining a portfolio of water-colours.

"Have you seen my last picture by 'Murillo?'" he asked; "you are fond of paintings, are you not, Miss Hyde?"

Catherine replied that she was, and that she had not seen the Murillo.

"Then you must all of you come with me

now," he cried, as he led the way into the picture gallery. "I picked it up the other day, and I fancy I have got rather a good thing."

It was a good thing, a genuine Murillo, the face of a Spanish gipsy, dark and swarthy, with large passionate eyes, and wavy blue black hair.

"There, look at that," exclaimed the banker, throwing himself into the attitude of a connoisseur. "Is not that a gem, if you please?"

They all said it was a gem, to Plantagenet's great delight, who expatiated on its merits, as though he had painted it himself. "I knew you would like it, Lady Slade," he cried; "I gave a lot of money for it; I flatter myself Plantagenet Jones knows a good thing when he sees it."

"I fancy I've seen it somewhere before," remarked Beatrice.

"Not this identical. Your Ladyship may have seen a copy, but the original belongs to me. I will hang it in the draw-

ing-room, I think, it is lost up here,—what say you, Lady Beatrice?"

Beatrice replied, "She fancied it would show to more advantage in the dining-room, though it was surrounded by art treasures where it was."

"I know who it is like," cried Catherine, suddenly, she had been regarding the picture for some time in silence. "It is like Mrs. Harrington."

"So it is," exclaimed the delighted millionaire. What wonderful eyes for penetration you have, Miss Hyde. "God bless my soul, it never struck me before,—it is like Mrs. Harrington."

Catherine was right—there was the same dark olive skin, the soft wavy hair, the burning lustrous eyes. They were all astonished at the extraordinary likeness, the speaking eyes of the gipsy seemed to regard them with a living look, the mocking smile hovered on the red parted lips.

"By Jove, if Stanley saw it, he would never let me rest, until he got it from me,"

cried Plantagenet Jones ; " it is the very image of his charming wife."

" Mrs. Harrington is not half so handsome," said Catherine coldly ; " it is the pretty likeness of a very plain woman."

" Oh, fie, Miss Hyde," cried the banker, smiling, turning round to where Catherine stood, and shaking his forefinger at her. " Beautiful women should never be jealous of each other."

" I am not jealous," replied Miss Hyde, proudly, " I merely expressed my opinion ; I was drawing no comparisons."

" I do not think Mrs. Harrington at all plain," remarked Beatrice ; " beauty after all is a matter of taste, and expression. I think I never saw a more expressive face than Mrs. Stanley Harrington's."

" Women are all charming to me," said the banker ; " I love all the sex."

" I think Mrs. Harrington sweetly pretty," interrupted Jane Jones.

" I think she is nice looking, but certainly not pretty," said Maria.

" There, young women, you are all at

variance, after the manner of your interesting sex. What is your opinion, Sarah?"

"I think no one handsome who is not religious," replied Miss Archer, severely. "Beauty with me consists in the soul."

"Then you must be very lovely, Sarah, my dear," exclaimed Plantagenet Jones, with a hearty burst of laughter, while on every other face beamed a smile of amusement. The discomfited Miss Archer walked away, casting a glance of indignation on her cousin.

"'Handsome is as handsome does,' that is the motto with our Sarah," said the banker. "Poor little soul, she would never believe in a 'Lovely Devil.'"

"I do not know who would," remarked Catherine Hyde, a look of scorn on her exquisite face.

"Not such as you, my dear—God forbid—but I've met a few in the course of my life," replied the millionaire, smiling.

Beatrice told the story of the painting to her husband that evening over dinner, and

Sir Reginald said he would go over to the Towers in the morning, and take a look at the wonderful picture.

Beatrice laughingly advised him to take Stanley Harrington with him, as it would be such fun if he wanted to purchase it from Mr. Jones.

Sir Reginald promised he would ; but the next day he told her, with a flush on his face when he spoke, that he had got old Jones to sell it to him,—he, (Sir Reginald) not possessing a Murillo, and Plantagenet having three or four. Besides, Miss Archer, for some unaccountable reason, objected to its being hung in the dining-room."

"There's no accounting for women's whims," observed the baronet.

"But, my dear," ventured Lady Slade, with the faintest shade of surprise in her eyes and voice, "do you not think it is more fitted for the Harringtons than for us? The likeness to Mrs. Harrington is so great, I am sure her husband would wish to possess it. I like Mrs. Stanley very



much indeed as an acquaintance, but I do not see what we want with her portrait."

"Hang the portrait," exclaimed Sir Reginald, with a frown of annoyance. "What the devil does it matter who it's like, so long as it is a Murillo, Harrington buy it? Not he; why he hasn't half its value at his bankers!"

Lady Slade did not see the Joneses again till Sunday, when (being a fine day) the whole of the congregation turned out to welcome the new incumbent of 'All Saints'. Dr. Bingham being pronounced so seriously unwell as to preclude every possibility of his ever being able to officiate again.

He was greatly beloved by his parishioners, but that did not prevent them being interested in his successor; like the rest of this volatile world, the good folks of Rubestown were always ready to turn to the rising sun.

*Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi!* was their motto, as well as their neighbours'. The advent of a new Anglican minister was the

source of endless conversation, not only amongst his future congregation, but also outside that particular church. What stand he would take ; what " views " he would hold ; what special " work " he would do in the parish ; what innovations he would introduce ; or what customs abolish.

The older inhabitants intended to stand no nonsense, but to give him a piece of their mind, if he happened to prove refractory. The younger members were secretly delighted at the thought of having something more sensational in the way of sermons, than the prosy compositions of the poor old Rector.

It had already got whispered abroad, that the future incumbent was a distant connexion of the Duke of A——, and it was at the recommendation of the opulent banker, Jones, that he had been appointed to ' All Saints.' They knew also he had been officiating lately in, or near London, and had left in consequence of some quarrel with the churchwardens, respecting the number of candles and flowers he put on the altar.

He would not be restricted here, the fair hands of Maria and Jane would adorn his church with as many as he pleased, and the devout eyes and tongue of Miss Sarah Archer keep all his little ragamuffins in order. He could have "districts," and "work" and exercise his charity in a thousand manifold ways.

If he behaved himself according to their ideas, well and good ; but should he become refractory, woe betide him. The Rubestownites would have him out, in spite of the Duke of A—— and the Monarch of Moorshire.

The first person Lady Slade saw on entering the church, was little Rosamond Etheridge, who was preparing to take her accustomed place in the choir. Lady Slade stopped in the porch for a moment to speak to her favourite. Catherine Hyde swept on calm and stately to her seat. Rosamond caught hold of Lady Slade's hand.

"I've seen him," she whispered, with a knowing smile.

"Seen whom, dearest?"

"Why, the new Curate to be sure. He is awfully good-looking—just like a picture in a book."

Lady Slade smiled.

"My dear Rosamond, I never saw you so enthusiastic before—about parsons."

"I don't like them as a rule, but this one's a darling—so pale and thin, and such lovely dark eyes."

"Hush, Rosamond. You must not speak like that in church."

"But he is," persisted Rosamond, not at all daunted by her ladyship's grave manner. "I'm sure I shall never be able to sing to-day for looking at him. Won't all the girls run after him?"

"Oh, you naughty child. What do you know about such things?" cried Beatrice, in a frightened whisper. "Go to your seat, and let me hear you sing your best."

"I will if I can, to please you, dearest Lady Slade," said Rosamond, with another squeeze of the hand. "But I'm sure I

shall be looking at the Curate all the time."

Sir Reginald Slade and Catherine Hyde were already in their places when Beatrice arrived. The church was very full, and the congregation very orderly, considering they were all on the tiptoe of expectation.

Beatrice felt unusually grave ; the coming of this young minister was not of the slightest interest to her, but she never entered the house of God without a feeling of the most intense reverence—her gentle soul bowed itself before its Maker in the meekest spirit of self-abnegation. Of religion Lady Slade knew very little ; it had not formed part of her education, but she felt sufficient to cause her to prostrate herself before the Crucifix that adorned the altar, with the simple faith of a child—loving, and desiring to be loved ; grateful, and acknowledging her own unworthiness. Catherine Hyde knelt as she always knelt—composed, absorbed, recollected.

The girl was an enigma.

Proud, selfish, vain, in the church she

was a different being ; all the coldness and hardness of her face disappeared in the sweet ecstatic look she bent on the altar and its precious symbol. There seemed no pride, no haughtiness, in the graceful drooping figure—the small clasped hands. No matter what cause, nothing ever disturbed the recollection of her manner, the intenseness of her devotion ; she always appeared as if there was no one save God and herself in the church.

She was kneeling thus, when the swelling notes of the organ rolled through the gothic aisles, and, following a troupe of white robed choristers, the young Anglican minister issued from the vestry, and ascended the reading-desk.

Then, as the lovely eyes of Catherine Hyde fell upon him for the first time, she gave a little start, and clasped her sister's arm.

Beatrice, astonished at this unusual emotion on the part of her sister, looked up quickly, and recognized in the new Curate

of "All Saints'" the young clergyman who had united Sir Reginald Slade and herself in marriage three months before.

The Reverend Adrian Hope !

END OF VOL. I.











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